THE AUSTRALIAN NEW CAR ENCYCLOPAEDIA

AUSTRALIAN New Car BUYER

CARS OF THE YEAR

260 NEW CARS & SUVS

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!
RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY



PLUS

- NEW-MODEL DIARY JANUARY-JUNE 2015
- MERCEDES C-CLASS
- 2015 HSV CLUBSPORT
- MASERATI GHIBLI
- BMW i8, M3, M4

NEW

- HONDA JAZZ
- MAZDA2
- NISSAN QASHQAI
- PEUGEOT 308
- PORSCHE MACAN

GO PONY!

HERE COMES THE 2015 MUSTANG

Universal Magazines
2015 No. 44
AUS $8.95*
NZ $9.95
(Both incl. GST)

ISSN 1446 - 733X
26
9 771446 733005

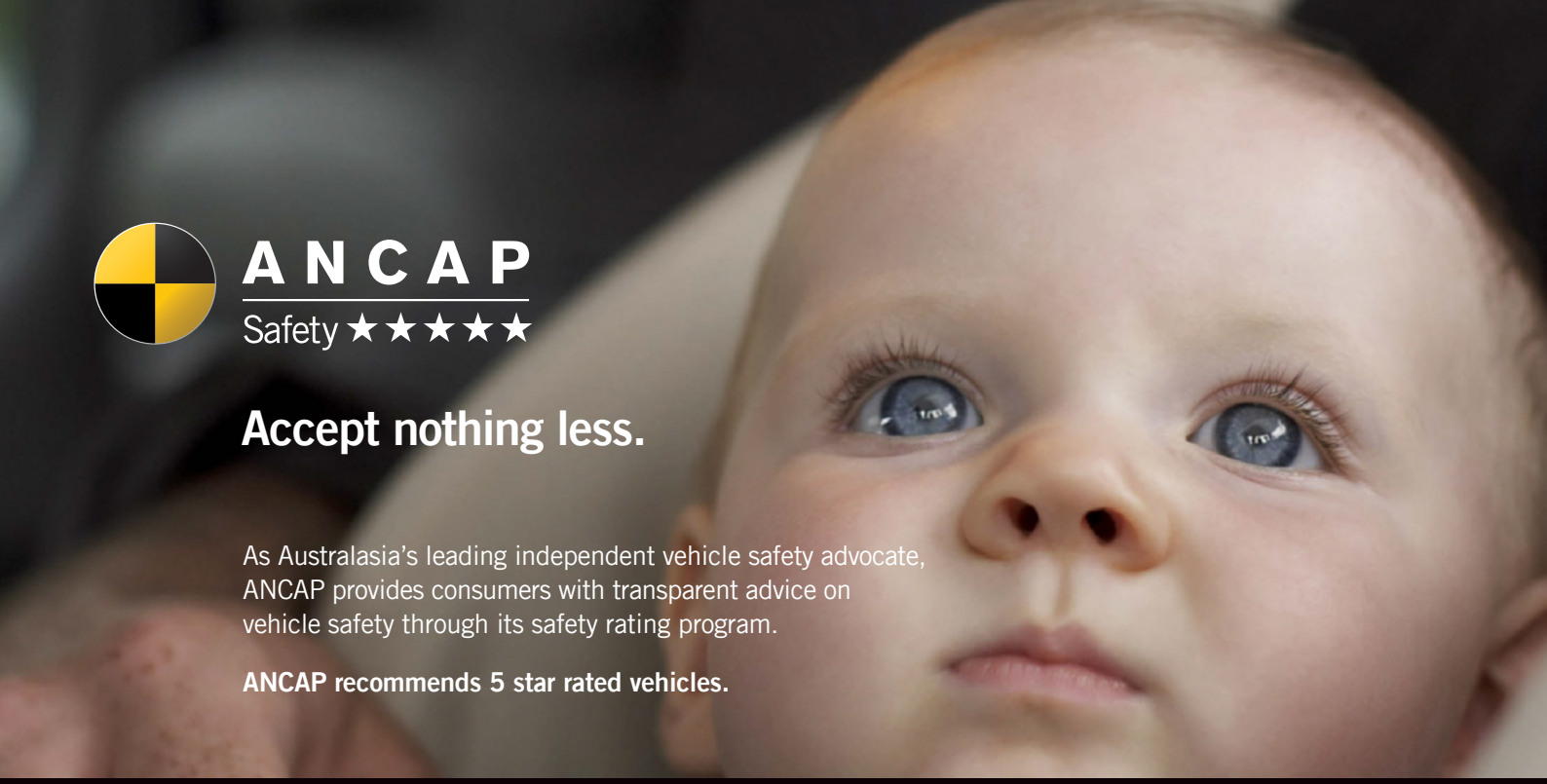


LAMBORGHINI HURACÁN
SON OF GALLARDO FROM $428,000



MERCEDES-AMG GT
MERC'S PORSCHE 911 HUNTER

EXCLUSIVE: REDBOOK TRADE-IN VALUES



ANCAP
Safety ★★★★★

Accept nothing less.

As Australasia's leading independent vehicle safety advocate, ANCAP provides consumers with transparent advice on vehicle safety through its safety rating program.

ANCAP recommends 5 star rated vehicles.

Make/Model	Frontal Offset Test (out of 16)	Side Impact Test (out of 16)	Pole Test (out of 2)	Whiplash Rating	Pedestrian Protection Rating	Seat Belt Reminders (out of 3)	Overall Score (out of 37)	ANCAP Safety Rating
Citroen C4 Grand Picasso from 2014	13.53	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	34.53	★★★★★
Ford Ranger from May 2014	15.72	16.00	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	35.72	★★★★★
Honda Odyssey from 2014	12.75	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	2	32.75	★★★★★
Infiniti Q50 2WD from 2014	14.76	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	35.76	★★★★★
Jeep Cherokee 2.0 litre diesel AWD from 2014	15.16	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.16	★★★★★
Kia Cerato Koup from 2013	14.51	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	35.51	★★★★★
Kia pro_cee'd from 2014	15.19	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.19	★★★★★
Lexus CT200h from December 2014	15.13	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.13	★★★★★
Lexus IS from April 2013	14.00	16.00	2	Good	Good	3	35.00	★★★★★
Maserati Ghibli from 2014	15.47	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.47	★★★★★
Mazda 3 from 2014	15.40	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.40	★★★★★
Mercedes-Benz C-Class from 2014	15.46	16.00	2	Good	Good	3	36.46	★★★★★
Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV from 2014	15.58	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	2	35.58	★★★★★
Nissan Pathfinder Hybrid from 2013	14.73	16.00	2	Good	Marginal	3	35.73	★★★★★
Nissan Qashqai from 2014	15.56	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	3	36.56	★★★★★
Peugeot 2008 from 2013	14.22	15.81	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	34.03	★★★★★
Peugeot 5008 from 2013	15.41	16.00	2	Good	Marginal	3	36.41	★★★★★
Skoda Rapid 4 cyl petrol from 2014	15.37	16.00	2	Acceptable	Acceptable	2	35.37	★★★★★
Ssangyong Stavic from 2013	9.06	15.49	0	---	---	0	24.55	★★★★☆
Subaru WRX from 2014	14.85	16.00	2	Good	Good	3	35.85	★★★★★
Tata Xenon 4x4 dual cab from 2013	11.27	16.00	0	---	---	0	16.49*	★★☆☆☆
Toyota Corolla sedan from 2014	14.88	16.00	2	Good	Acceptable	2	34.88	★★★★★
Toyota Kluger / Highlander from 2014	14.97	16.00	2	Good	Marginal	2.6	35.57	★★★★★
Volkswagen Polo from August 2014	14.98	15.98	2	Acceptable	Marginal	2	34.96	★★★★★

* Overall score truncated.

Vehicles rated by ANCAP from January to August 2014. To view the full list of vehicles rated by ANCAP, and to check variant applicability, visit

ancap.com.au



CarLoans.com.au
GET A BETTER CAR



carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

34 BMW M3 and M4

Welcome to *Australian New Car Buyer*.

Time once again for our Cars of the Year. As always, it's not just brand new 2014 models that are eligible, but any current model on the market.

Mazda makes extremely high-quality, reliable, safe, well-priced cars so the new Mazda2 (on page 89) gets the small car award this year. Next size up, VW's Golf (p152) is still the pick of the field.

Mazda's CX5 (p92) is the best compact SUV, while the Mazda6 (p91) retains its best family car title.

In luxury territory, the new Mercedes C Class (p99) has a clear lead, while the Mercedes E Class (p100) is still the pick of the large German sedan/wagon offerings.

Best luxury SUV is BMW's X5 (p39).

There's no shortage of red hot performance machinery out there, and you don't have to spend a fortune either. Although it does help...

In ascending order of price, may we suggest the Ford Fiesta ST (p47), Toyota 86/Subaru BRZ (p147/140), Renault RS265 (p133), Subaru WRX STi (p137), HSV Clubsport R8 (p66), Mercedes A or CLA45 AMG (p97), Porsche Cayman S (p128) and Porsche 911 Carrera S (p126). Pick any of these and you'll be smiling on every drive. The two standouts are HSV's Clubsport R8 and the Porsche Cayman S.

Your comments are always welcome. Just email us at **info@newcarguide.com.au**

Bill McKinnon
Editor

CONTENTS

6 NEW MODEL DIARY
The first half of 2015 is headed by Mercedes' full frontal challenge to the Porsche 911, the AMG GT coupe. Mercedes will also let the new C63 AMG loose. Audi's third generation TT, Mazda's brand new MX5 and the VW Polo GTi are also scheduled.

9 HIT THE ROAD
The ultimate road trip guide, Explore Australia's *Driving Holidays Around Australia* features 40 of the country's most iconic road trips.

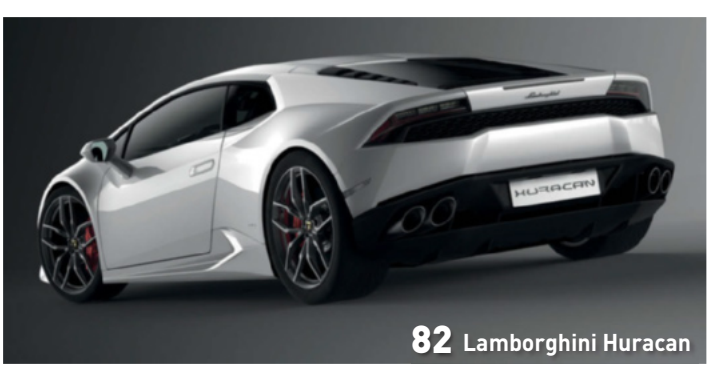
10 FORD MUSTANG
Henry's hero coupe hasn't previously been made in right-hand drive form, but the new model will be and we will get it in the middle of the year, with (cough...) four cylinder and V8 engines

11 MONEY TALKS
Confused about your car finance options? Read this.

12 THE SHOWROOM
Our exclusive make and model guide to more than 260 new cars and SUVs.

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY







87 Maserati Ghibli



41 BMW i8

TOP TESTS

18 AUDI A3
34 BMW M3/M4
41 BMW i8
48 FORD FALCON XR
52 HOLDEN VF COMMODORE
54 HOLDEN VF SS
59 HONDA JAZZ
66 HSV CLUBSPORT
72 HYUNDAI iX35
74 JAGUAR F TYPE
82 LAMBORGHINI HURACAN
86 LEXUS IS
87 MASERATI GHIBLI
89 MAZDA2
90 MAZDA3
98 MERCEDES GLA
99 MERCEDES C CLASS
105 MINI COOPER
118 NISSAN QASHQAI
122 PEUGEOT 308
129 PORSCHE MACAN
140 SUBARU BRZ
143 TOYOTA COROLLA
148 TOYOTA KLUGER
152 VW GOLF
161 VOLVO V40

10 Ford Mustang



SYMBOLS

In our tests on the following pages and in the Showroom, we have used symbols to give you a quick indication of the strengths of each car, and star ratings to indicate in more detail how each car stacks up in its class. Here's what the symbols and stars mean:

Our piggybank indicates a car that we think represents good value for money against the others in its class. It may not necessarily be the cheapest, but taking into account factors like standard equipment, safety, the way it drives, resale values and quality, it shapes up as a good deal.

S A capital S indicates a car that scores five stars out of five for occupant protection in NCAP crash tests and has stability control plus six airbags as standard or as reasonably priced options. You can get full details for individual cars, including recently introduced child-protection ratings for some models, at www.ancap.com.au

If you're after a safe, practical car in which to carry the kids, look for this symbol. We've limited its use to cars which have an NCAP score of at least four stars out of five, and have curtain airbags as standard or as affordable options. We've also taken into account things like the placement of child restraint anchor points, a versatile, spacious load area and other parent-friendly features such as plenty of storage.

This is an internationally-recognised symbol for environmentally-friendly products and we've used it to indicate cars that score at least four stars out of five in the Federal Government's *Green Vehicle Guide*. If you want to find out how the star ratings are achieved, go to www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au

A trophy indicates a car that, all things considered, is at or near the top of its class. It's important to note that we don't test cars against some perfect theoretical model. We test them against their competitors, so it's an apples with apples comparison. Features that are important in sports cars, for example, such as performance and handling, are less important in, say, the mid-size hatchback class, where buyers are looking for fuel economy and space efficiency.

STARS ★★★½☆

★ The star rating for safety is from NCAP crash tests and the *Green Vehicle Guide* stars are as per the car's rating in the *Green Vehicle Guide* itself.

★ Other star ratings, including the overall star rating, reflect how the car rates against others in its class.

PRICES

- Prices are manufacturer's list prices and do not include options, on-road charges or insurance. These vary from state to state. Dealers are now required, when they advertise a price, to make it the drive-away price, including on-road charges.
- Note that manufacturers can and do change prices regularly and in some cases this will have occurred after our publication deadline. If you want to check current drive-away prices, we suggest going to a website such as carsales.com.au where you'll also find the latest offers.

AUSTRALIAN New Car BUYER

EDITOR
Bill McKinnon
DESIGNER
Katharine McKinnon
COPY EDITOR
Anastasia Casey
ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES
Peter Rhodes
pete.rhodes@bigpond.com
03 5943 1770; 0413 154 460

Universal Magazines

CEO/CHAIRMAN
Prema Perera
PUBLISHER
Janice Williams
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
Vicky Mahadeva
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Emma Perera
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Karen Day
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Mark Darton
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Kate Podger
EDITORIAL PRODUCTION MANAGER
Anastasia Casey
PRINT PRODUCTION MANAGER
Lilian Ohanessian
PREPRESS MANAGER
Ivan Fitz-Gerald
MARKETING & ACQUISITIONS MANAGER
Chelsea Peters

Circulation enquiries to our Sydney head office (02) 9805 0399.
Australian New Car Buyer No 44 is published by Universal Magazines, Unit 5, 6-8 Byfield Street, North Ryde 2113. Phone (02) 9805 0399, Fax: (02) 9805 0714. Melbourne office, Level 1, 150 Albert Road, South Melbourne Vic 3205. Phone (03) 9694 6444, Fax (03) 9699 7890. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers www.timesprinters.com, distributed by Network Services, Sydney.

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers. The publishers believe all the information supplied in this book to be correct at the time of printing. They are not, however, in a position to make a guarantee to this effect and accept no liability in the event of any information proving inaccurate. Prices, addresses and phone numbers were, after investigation and to the best of our knowledge and belief, up to date at the time of printing, but the shifting sands of time may change them in some cases. It is not possible for the publishers to ensure that advertisements which appear in this publication comply with the Trade Practices Act, 1974. The responsibility must therefore be on the person, company or advertising agency submitting the advertisements for publication. While every endeavour has been made to ensure complete accuracy, the publishers cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions.

The contents of this magazine is printed on paper produced in a mill that meets Certified Environmental Management System ISO9001 Cover: 14001.

* Recommended retail price
ISSN 1446-733X

Copyright © Universal Magazines MMXV

ACN 003 026 944
www.universalmagazines.com.au

Please pass on or recycle this magazine.

We are a member of

PublishersAustralia
media that engages

AMG GT



THE NEW MODEL DIARY
JANUARY-JUNE 2015

AMG GT



MERCEDES-AMG GT
Mercedes has positioned this delicious coupe to take on the Porsche 911 when it arrives in the second quarter of the year. The GT gets AMG's 340kW 4.0-litre bi-turbo V8; top-spec GTS ups this to 375kW, with a 0-100km/h time of 3.8 seconds. Transmission is seven-speed dual clutch and the body is aluminium spaceframe, so weight is ballpark 911 numbers at 1540-1570kg.

Prices should start in the mid-$200K zone.

AUDI TT
The third generation of one of the world's most influential design icons arrives with a longer wheelbase and sheetmetal that's closer to the original than the second-generation car. There's a suite of 2.0-litre turbopetrol and turbodiesel engines, including a 228kW turbopetrol in the TTS quattro, plus six-speed manual and S-Tronic transmissions. Interior has a completely digitised instrument display. The TT roadster arrives in the second half of the year.

The A3 E-Tron, Audi's first plug-in petrol/electric hybrid, arrives in March. It offers electric-only power for up to 50km and a combined petrol/electric range of up to 940km, averaging just 1.6L/100km.

BMW i8
BMW's wondrous carbon-fibre bodied, plug-in petrol/electric performance weapon arrives in March, priced at $299,000. It produces up to 266kW from its

Audi TT



BMW 2 Series convertible



combined 1.5-litre turbopetrol/electric drivetrain and can hit 100km/h in a claimed 4.5 seconds while returning 2.5L/100km. Electric-only range is about 35km; petrol/electric is 500km. See our i8 test on page 41.

The 2 Series convertible is also due shortly, with the same drivetrain choices as the coupe.

HOLDEN

The first half of 2015 sees Holden launching three new models sourced from GM's European brand, Opel, which, you may remember, tried setting up shop here a few years ago.

The first "Hopel" due off the boat is the Cascada, which is an Astra convertible. The Astra GTC and VXR three-door hatchbacks follow, then the Insignia VXR sedan. These cars will be pitched as premium Euros but beware of suspect reliability.

HONDA

Honda reprises its small 1999-2001 HRV SUV this year with a new model, based on the Jazz, probably with 1.5-litre petrol and



Holden Cascada

BMW i8




Mazda MX5

petrol/electric drivetrain options. No pricing details as yet.

HYUNDAI

It has just launched a rear-wheel-drive Commodore competitor, the Genesis sedan, and the South Korean juggernaut rolls on into 2015 with two more important models that may see it claim the number-two position in our market from Holden by the end of the year.

The little i20 hatch, with 1.2 and 1.4-litre petrol engine, and the Toyota Camry-sized Sonata sedan are both due in the first half of 2015.

KIA

The Rio hatch gets a facelift for 2015 but the big news is the new Sorento seven-seater SUV. We'll get a choice of 205kW 3.3-litre V6 petrol or 147kW/441Nm 2.2-litre turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/front or all-wheel drivetrains, in a more rigid body with suspension tuned here for local road conditions.

The same vehicle, in seven-seater Grand Carnival people-mover guise, also arrives with the front-wheel-drive 3.3-litre petrol V6 drivetrain and features such as surround cameras, a power-operated tailgate and third-row seating that folds into the floor.

MAZDA MX-5

The all-new fourth-generation MX-5 roadster arrives mid-year with an as yet unconfirmed engine line-up, which may include a base-model 1.5-litre Skyactiv direct-injection petrol four, as used in the Mazda2 hatch. Transmissions are six-speed manual and automatic. Suspension is double wishbone front/multilink rear.

Presumably, the 2.0-litre and, hopefully, 2.5-litre Skyactiv engines will also be available in the MX-5, which remains a rear-wheel-drive folding soft top, with 50:50 weight distribution as per the original, which was introduced 26 years ago. The new model has shed almost 100kg.

LEXUS RC

Lexus has launched its NX SUV range in late 2014 and, as we go to press, is about to follow this up with the RC coupe.

The rear-wheel-drive RC coupe will be available with a 235kW 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine. The RC-F, which is optimistically pitched as a BMW M4 competitor, packs a 351kW 5.0-litre V8 that's naturally aspirated so if turbo power doesn't do it for you, at least there's now an alternative. The Lexus engine revs out to 7300rpm.


Lexus RCF


Mercedes-AMG C63



Kia Sorento



Subaru Outback

MERCEDES-AMG C63
Join the queue for this, the successor to the hugely popular 6.2-litre, V8-powered C63 AMG that really put Mercedes' performance brand on the map in Australia.

The 2015 version runs a 4.0-litre bi-turbo V8, with 375kW in the S version and 350kW in the base model. These are the same engines used in the AMG GT coupe. Sedan and wagon versions will also be offered.

Pricing hadn't been announced as we went to press but it's up against BMW's M3, so expect circa-$160K start money.

SUBARU
The Liberty was once one of Australia's best-selling mid-size cars, but it has faded to near irrelevance in recent years as newer, much more stylish rivals have moved in.

The 2015 model arrives with no notable changes in dimension but greater body rigidity, more elegant sheetmetal, a richer interior, suspension improvements and electric power steering.

Engines remain the 2.5-litre four cylinder, now with 130kW and 190kW 3.6-litre six-cylinder naturally aspirated boxers, with a CVT transmission and all-wheel drive.

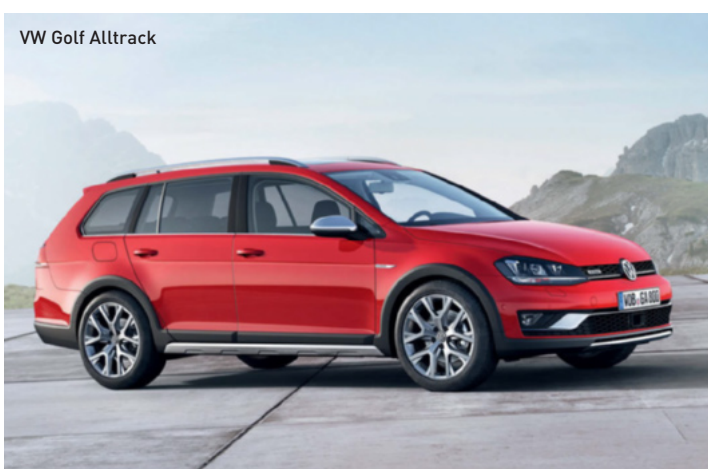
The Outback wagon has the same drivetrain options and shares the new styling. The 2.0-litre turbodiesel/CVT drivetrain, easily the pick of them, will also be available later in the year.

VOLKSWAGEN
The new Polo GTi is due shortly and it should be a beauty, with a 141kW 1.8-litre turbopetrol engine, plus six-speed manual and seven-speed DSG transmission choices. The 0100km/h trip takes 6.7 seconds and electronically adjustable dampers will be available.

A new Passat is due in the second half of the year, as is a high-riding Golf Alltrack wagon

VOLVO
The new XC90 launches here in the second quarter, with prices starting at $89,950 for the 165kW/470Nm 2.0-litre D5 turbodiesel. The 236kW/400Nm 2.0-litre T6 turbopetrol is priced from $93,950 and the 296kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/electric plug-in hybrid T8 is $122,950.

An eight-speed automatic is standard.



VW Golf Alltrack

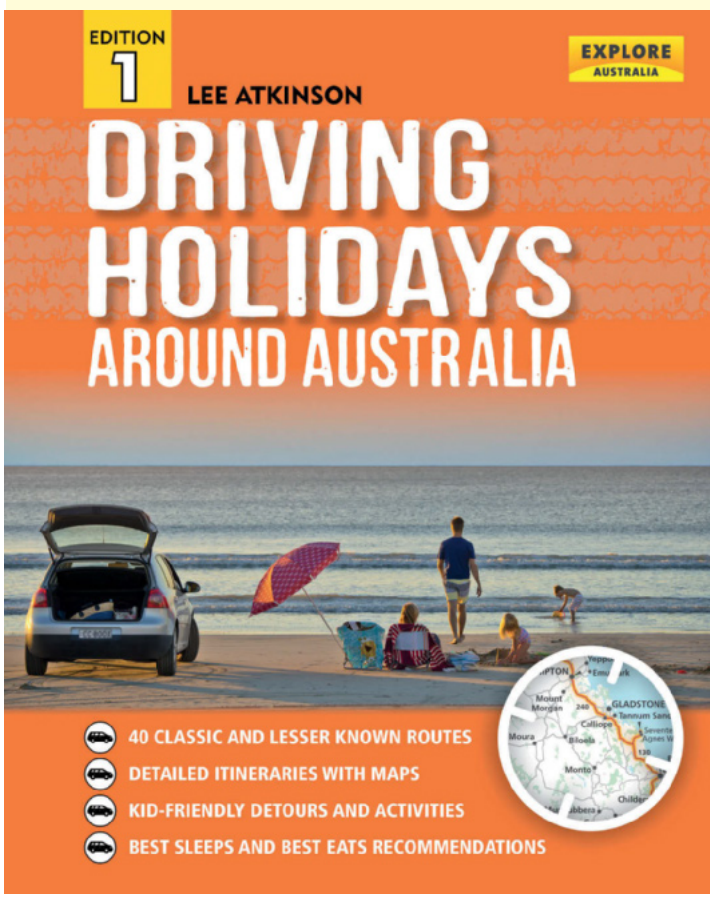
DRIVE AWAY

LEE Atkinson's new book, *Driving Holidays Around Australia*, covers in detail 40 of the country's most iconic road trips. Whether you're after a weekend jaunt or something more extended into Australia's wild outback, you'll find it in *Driving Holidays Around Australia*.

Follow the Indian Ocean Drive, where the great Indian Ocean meets the desert, from Perth to Geraldton; leave the bright lights of Sydney behind for the blue haze of the Blue Mountains; travel along the Matilda Highway through Queensland's rugged outback to the border with New South Wales; or meander along the Murray River in Victoria.

Lee has driven every road trip in the book and includes detailed information on every drive. Each trip includes details on the best time to travel, itinerary options, attractions in towns, national parks, potential side trips, food and accommodation listings and a kids' spot for family road trippers, as well as a map marking out the route.

Driving Holidays Around Australia comes in a durable spiral-bound format, perfect for using in the car. Published by Explore Australia, it's available for $39.95 at bookstores and roadhouses around the country.









FORD MUSTANG

FIFTY years after the original, the mighty Ford Mustang is at last being manufactured as a right-hand drive, so we'll be seeing it here mid-year in a couple of variants.

The 2015 'Stang, which marks a welcome return to the fastback profile, will be available in Australia initially with a choice of two engines, in GT specification.

If the concept of a four-cylinder Mustang seems a little (OK, a lot...) weird, then perhaps a drive in the 227kW/407Nm EcoBoost 2.3-litre direct-injection twin-scroll turbopetrol GTDI four may change your mind. It's matched with a Getrag six-speed manual or six-speed automatic with paddles.

There's a V8, of course, Ford's 5.0-litre naturally aspirated engine with 313kW at 6500rpm and 529Nm at 4250rpm. New heads, larger valves and intake manifold for 2015 give the engine superior breathing and it will now rev to 7000rpm.

Suspension is MacPherson strut front and independent multilink rear, with monotube dampers on the V8. Steering is electrohydraulic, with driver-adjustable assistance levels.

The four cylinder runs 19-inch alloys with 255/40 tyres all round. The V8 has 275/40 rubber at the rear.

Pricing had not been announced as we went to press, but best guess is circa $50K for the four-cylinder Mustang and HSV territory — starting in the mid-$60K range for the V8.



Image: Bigstock

CAR LOAN COMPARISONS

How to REALLY compare car loans — John Cadogan says it's easier than you think

MANY people miss the point when they attempt to compare a range of different car loans. Often, borrowers look at only one factor — usually the interest rate — but sometimes also the monthly repayment. The truth about comparing car loans is actually a little more complicated than that.

It's important to understand the detail because significant savings are on offer for those who do their sums correctly.

First up, you need to decide which ownership mechanism is right for you. There are conventional car loans and unsecured personal loans, usually on offer for private customers. In addition there are novated leases, which allow you to acquire the vehicle GST-free and use your pre-tax income to help pay for the vehicle if you're an employee on a salary or wages. There are business ownership options such as commercial hire purchase agreements that are sometimes advantageous for businesses.

Choosing the right mechanism is critical to maximising the cost-effectiveness and the tax-effectiveness of car ownership, so half an hour spent with a competent financial advisor can save you thousands, ultimately.

Next, you really need to compare the finance type you need from a variety of different lenders.

In reality, the main factor in comparing car loans is: How much is this loan really going to cost me in total? Say you've got three of four different car loans in front of you — all for the same amount, all for the same term. The best way to compare them is to add up the total amount payable over the term of the loan. This would mean starting with the establishment fee, plus broker or dealer origination fees (if any) and then taking the regular payment (whether it's weekly, fortnightly or monthly) and multiplying it by the total number of payments. You also need to add in any regular charges, such as monthly account-keeping fees.

Getting the total cost of each loan right is vital because fees and other charges can have a huge impact on the cost of the loan overall. In fact, fees and other charges can mean that a high-fee loan with a really sharp-sounding six per cent notional interest rate might actually be more expensive overall than a low-fee car loan at a more expensive-sounding 10 per cent rate.

You really owe it to yourself to do the numbers on each and every car loan offer, and not merely focus on the one factor, like a nice low-interest-rate number.

Exactly the same comparison method applies to commercial car finance agreements as well — provided it's an apples-for-apples comparison. You'll need to make sure they're all, say, operating leases, and the term and amounts are identical. In the case of a residual or balloon payment at the end of the term, this amount would need to be the same as well.

Once you have those comparative numbers ballparked, you should also evaluate the early repayment penalty. Some loans with low setup costs impose hefty penalties for early repayment — although this might not be important to you if you deem it unlikely that you will exit the car loan agreement early.

Finally, you need to make sure you qualify for the cheapest loan you have identified. You also need to make sure the vehicle itself is one that the lender is prepared to lend you the funds for, on those terms.

If you're interested in comparing different types of car loans, visit www.AutoExpert.com.au. Complete the contact form and I'll put you in touch with a specialist financier who can advise you professionally. Even if you have a poor credit rating, you might be amazed how easy it is to get quality car finance.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Cadogan is an automotive consumer expert. He is a commentator on Channel 7's Sunrise, as well as Seven News, and a host on Sydney Radio 2UE. He also provides expert commentary and advice on his blog, www.AutoExpert.com.au

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY
carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!



THE SHOWROOM

In THE SHOWROOM this issue, new entries include the BMW i8, BMW M3 and M4, Ford FG-X Falcon, Honda Jazz, Lamborghini Huracán, Maserati Ghibli, Mazda2, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV, Nissan Qashqai, Peugeot 308 and the Porsche Macan.

ALFA ROMEO
14 Alfa Romeo Giulietta
15 Alfa Romeo MiTo

ASTON MARTIN
16 Aston Martin Vantage S

AUDI
17 Audi A1
18 Audi A3
19 Audi S3
20 Audi Q3
21 Audi A7 Sportback, RS5
22 Audi A4
23 Audi Q7, Audi R8
24 Audi A5
25 Audi A6
26 Audi Q5

BMW
27 BMW 1 Series Hatch
28 BMW 2 Series
29 BMW M135i
30 BMW M235i

90 Mazda3





52 Holden VF Commodore

31 BMW Z4; 6 Series
33 BMW 3 Series
33 BMW 4 Series
34 BMW M3/M4
35 BMW Gran Coupe; M5
36 BMW 5 Series
37 BMW X1
38 BMW X3
39 BMW X5
40 BMW X6, 7 Series
41 BMW i8

CITROEN
42 Citroën C4; C5
43 Citroën DS3

FIAT
43 Fiat 500

FORD
44 Ford Ecosport
45 Ford Focus
46 Ford Falcon
47 Ford Fiesta; Ford Kuga
48 Ford Falcon XR
49 Ford Territory

HOLDEN
50 Holden Captiva
41 Holden Trax
52 Holden VF Commodore



122 Peugeot 308



59 Honda Jazz

54 Holden Commodore SS
55 Holden VF Ute
56 Holden Cruze
57 Holden Volt; Holden Malibu
58 Holden Barina

HONDA
58 Honda Accord Euro
59 Honda Jazz
60 Honda Civic hatch
61 Honda Civic sedan
62 Honda Odyssey
63 Honda CRZ
64 Honda Accord
65 Honda CRV

HSV
66 HSV Clubsport
67 HSV GTS

HYUNDAI
68 Hyundai i30
69 Hyundai i40; Veloster
70 Hyundai Santa Fe
71 Hyundai Accent; Elantra
72 Hyundai ix35

INFINITI
73 Infiniti Q50

JAGUAR
74 Jaguar F Type
75 Jaguar XF
76 Jaguar XFR-S; Jaguar XJ

KIA
77 Kia Rio
77 Kia Rondo
79 Kia Cerato; Kia Optima
79 Kia Proceed
81 Kia Sportage; Kia Koup

LAMBORGHINI
82 Huracan

LEXUS
83 Lexus ES
84 Lexus GS
85 Lexus CT200h; Lexus RX
86 Lexus IS

MASERATI
87 Maserati Ghibli
88 Maserati Quattroporte

MAZDA
89 Mazda 2
90 Mazda 3
91 Mazda 6
92 Mazda CX5
93 Mazda CX9

MERCEDES-BENZ
94 Mercedes-Benz A Class
95 Mercedes-Benz B Class
96 Mercedes-Benz CLA Class
97 Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG
98 Mercedes-Benz GLA
99 Mercedes-Benz C Class
100 Mercedes-Benz E Class
101 E Class coupe; SL
102 Mercedes-Benz SLK, E63 AMG
103 Mercedes-Benx S Class
104 Mercedes-Benz M Class

MINI
105 Mini Cooper
106 Mini Coupe, Roadster
106 Mini Countryman

MITSUBISHI
107 Mitsubishi Lancer
108 Mitsubishi i-MieV; Mirage
109 Mitsubishi Ralliart, Evolution
110 Mitsubishi Outlander
111 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV
112 Mitsubishi ASX

NISSAN
112 Nissan Juke
113 Nissan Pulsar
114 Nissan Altima
115 Nissan Leaf; Pulsar SSS
116 Nissan 370Z, GTR
117 Nissan X-Trail
118 Nissan Qashqai
119 Nissan Pathfinder

PEUGEOT
120 Peugeot 208
121 Peugeot 208 GTi
122 Peugeot 308
123 Peugeot 508
124 Peugeot RCZ

PORSCHE
124 Porsche Panamera
125 Porsche Boxster
126 Porsche 911 Carrera
127 Porsche Cayenne
128 Porsche Cayman
129 Porsche Macan

RENAULT
130 Renault Clio RS
131 Renault Clio
132 Renault Megane; Koleos
133 Renault Megane RS265

SKODA
134 Skoda Yeti
135 Skoda Octavia

SUBARU
135 Subaru Impreza
136 Subaru WRX
137 Subaru WRX STi
138 Subaru XV
139 Subaru Forester
140 Subaru BRZ

SUZUKI
141 Suzuki Swift, Alto

TOYOTA
142 Toyota Yaris
143 Toyota Corolla
144 Toyota Prius
145 Toyota Camry
146 Toyota Prius C
147 Toyota 86
148 Toyota RAV4
149 Toyota Aurion
150 Toyota Kluger

VOLKSWAGEN
151 Volkswagen Polo
152 Volkswagen Golf
153 Volkswagen Golf GTi
154 Volkswagen Scirocco, Golf cabrio
155 Volkswagen Jetta
156 Volkswagen Passat
157 Volkswagen Tiguan
158 Volkswagen Touareg
159 Volkswagen Multivan; Beetle

VOLVO
160 Volvo S60/V60
161 Volvo V40
162 Volvo XC60

126 Porsche 911



ALFA ROMEO **GIULIETTA** FROM **$24,550**



Alfa Romeo's Giulietta is a five-door hatch similar in size to the Volkswagen Golf. At $24,555, the base Giulietta Distinctive runs Fiat's 88kW 1.4-litre MultiAir engine with a six-speed manual.

The 125kW 1.4 MultiAir Progression is $27,450 with the manual or $29,450 with a six-speed twin-clutch automated manual TCT transmission. Distinctive grade, with the manual, is $29,350; with TCT, it's $31,350.

The MultiAir uses solenoids instead of a camshaft to operate the inlet valves so, in theory, you get more precise control over mixture and timing.

In practice, it's a surprisingly uninspiring, sluggish drive, even when you flick the "dial a digital tune" toggle to Dynamic and go hunting for some Alfa-style top-end zip. It's there, but in a fairly sedated state, sadly.

The softish suspension also lets the body roll too early and too often, probably because they've tried to make it feel like a Golf, and it's also nose heavy.

The Giulietta QV, though, is an entirely different story. At $39,150, with a six-speed manual the only transmission offered, its target is the Golf GTi. Drive both and you just might take this Alfa home.

Fiat's direct-injection 1.7-litre turbo (1750TBi in Alfa-speak) donk produces 173kW — 11kW more than the Golf GTi's 2.0 turbo — and 340Nm of torque, 10Nm less than the VW.

A 125kW/320Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel, with TCT as standard, costs $33,350 in Progression specification and $35,250 in Distinctive trim.

Fiat's diesel is a very strong engine, however it's not well served by the TCT transmission, which is hopelessly crude, harsh and erratic, especially in town, when compared with rivals' automated manual gearboxes.

The 1.7 in the QV is a bit limp below 4000rpm but so is every Alfa engine ever built. Its rev-happy nature suits the manual beautifully and Alfa's performance claim of 6.8 seconds to 100km/h is certainly believable.

The QV's suspension is lower and stiffer than the base models. It's got 18s with Pirelli PZeros and Alfa's understeer-arresting electronic front diff. On a tight road you can punt the QV pretty hard. It should torque-steer like mad but it doesn't, and the ride is reasonably forgiving, even on mangled bitumen.

Inside, there's a stylish, well-screwed-together dash with a control layout that's much more user-friendly than usual from Alfa.

Sadly, Alfa doesn't do its beautiful, supportive sports seats any longer, but the Giulietta's are reasonably comfortable.

The pedals are crowded in the footwell, a common Alfa legacy of a not-quite-comfortable right-hand drive configuration.

Back-seat space isn't overly generous for this class but the boot is large.

Unfortunately, but understandably, many potential buyers are put off Alfa by the brand's terrible reliability record. That is still a live issue but as a stylish, enjoyable drive, the Giulietta is worth a look.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★☆☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Cracker 1.7-litre engine
- ✔ Strong, light, safe body
- ✔ A genuinely sporty front-drive hatch
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ QV is well priced

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ The usual Alfa caveats
- ✘ Weak resales
- ✘ Problematic reliability
- ✘ TCT transmission is rubbish

SPEX (QV)

- Made in Italy
- 1.7-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 173kW of power at 5500rpm/340Nm of torque from 1900rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.8 seconds (claimed)
- 5.8L/100km highway; 10.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO_2 emissions are 177gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloys, Bluetooth, USB connectivity, cruise control, rear parking sensors. QV adds sports suspension and seats (with partial leather upholstery), 18-inch alloys, Bose audio, red brake calipers and side skirts
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 29%

compare with...

Audi A3, BMW 1 Series, Ford Focus, Volvo V40, VW Golf

ALFA ROMEO **MITO** FROM **$22,500**





Alfa Romeo's base MiTo hatch runs a 0.9-litre, two-cylinder turbopetrol Fiat engine with a mere 77kW of power, 145Nm of torque and a six-speed manual. It's the same unit used in the Fiat 500, and while it's a fine little engine, the unique variety of non-performance it offers is not quite in keeping with the MiTo's glamour hatch brief.

Fiat's 1.4-litre engine, with a much healthier 114kW/230Nm, is fitted to the Progression, priced at $24,500 with a five-speed manual. An extra $2000 buys the the low-power version (99kW/206Nm) which is unfortunately matched with the worst pseudo-auto, six-speed transmission on the market.

The Distinctive variant, with the same drivetrain, is $28,000.

Top of the range MiTo QV, with a 125kW 1.4, six-speed manual, four-piston front Brembo calipers and 18-inch wheels, is a pretty serious bit of gear, priced at $30,500.

The 114kW 1.4 is expressive and willing. Given its small capacity, it pulls with surprising ease and strength.

Don't go anywhere near the TCT transmission model.

The 99kW engine is gutless and the TCT is a complete mess in its shift timing and refinement.

The MiTo's dynamics are engaging and enjoyable. The ride, though, can become quite harsh.

As a bang-for-your-bucks deal, MiTo struggles to convince against some impressive, similarly priced rivals such as Citroën's DS3, Ford's brilliant Fiesta ST, Renault Clio and the Volkswagen Polo, all of which are better cars.

STARS ★★☆☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★☆☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★☆☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★☆☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Alfas make you feel good
- ✔ They are also gorgeous
- ✔ 114kW 1.4 is a sweet little engine
- ✔ Communicative, precise handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Cheap seats
- ✘ Cramped legroom
- ✘ Limited front suspension travel
- ✘ Alfa's unenviable quality and reliability record

SPEX (Progression)

- Made in Italy
- 1.4-litre four-cylinder turbo/ six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 114kW of power at 5500rpm/230Nm of torque at 3000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 8.0 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- 5.3L/100km highway; 8.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 153gkm
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, cruise control, 17-inch alloy wheels, USB audio connectivity, hands-free Bluetooth with voice recognition, rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Citroën DS3, Ford Fiesta ST, Renault Clio, VW Polo

ASTON MARTIN **VANTAGE S** FROM **$251,700**



The $251,700 Aston-Martin Vantage S coupe is a more performance-focused piece than the Vantage. It's been designed to go toe to toe with the Porsche 911, however in performance, style and specification the Roadster, which costs $280,600, can also be compared with Jaguar's F-Type V8 S.

A six-speed manual is standard. The optional $15,900 seven-speed, single-clutch Sportshift robobox is Italian, which doesn't bode well.

It's located at the rear, where a short diff helps slice a few tenths off the standard model's 0–100 number; now 4.5 seconds, it's still a few tenths slower than the 911 Carrera S with PDK and the F-Type.

Still, the 4.7 pulls from nothing and climbs into truly epic performance from 3000rpm where, in Sport mode, the note rises from a purr to a full-on muscle-car-style roar. Delicious.

Across the midrange you can feel its 490Nm of torque trying to escape by finding a weak link in the transaxle and breaking it, but the Vantage stays tidy and sticks to the bitumen.

Around town, though, the transaxle's bits bang and crash into each other and the clutch can overheat in stop/start traffic, especially if you're stuck on a hill.

At one stage, in feral Sydney afternoon gridlock, I thought the transmission was going to quit and go into self-protection I-won't-work-until-I-cool-down mode, so I stopped the car for five minutes to let it recover.

Take-no-prisoners, non-adjustable suspension; quicker steering; 20 pistons worth of brakes and wider 19s at both ends also give the S plenty of extra bang for the extra $20,700 they're asking over the base Vantage.

But it's a small coupe with a beast of a V8 up front, so it should handle and steer like something that's not particularly well balanced, right?

Surprisingly, no. Most of the V8's mass sits behind the front axle and the Aston's all-up weight is a reasonable 1610kg, so when you line up a set of tight corners it glides through them with exceptional finesse, control and balance.

Some of this is due to the fact that there are several alloy braces bolted to the body, but they do the trick because the Vantage feels incredibly solid.

It steers beautifully and you feel completely connected and in control because the feedback you get from the car is coming through at a million megabits per second.

The ride's pretty rugged but the Aston makes you feel so good that you can forgive the occasional collapsed vertebra.

Every time you slide into the Aston's perfectly formed, single-piece carbon fibre/Kevlar driver's seat (it's an option; take it) is an event, because everything you see, every surface you touch and every mechanism you operate has been designed to make you feel special.

Even the sunvisors feel like they cost $100,000 each. The doors open slightly upward and are perfectly counterbalanced, so no effort is required.

At night, the instruments glow with wondrous retro grey lighting, like an old photograph.

A 5.9-litre V12 Vantage S coupe, pictured, is priced at $389,300. The roadster is $418,525. The V12 also runs the seven-speed single clutch box, so it must be a brute of a thing in traffic. Still, 421kW and 0-100 in 3.9 seconds sounds like fun.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ It's so, so beautiful
- ✔ All muscle V8 performance
- ✔ Agile, communicative dynamics
- ✔ This is what a sports car cabin should feel like
- ✔ That driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Gearbox is pretty agricultural and doesn't like traffic
- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Pop-up navigation screen looks silly
- ✘ Overpriced

SPEX (S Coupe Sportshift)

- Made in England
- 4.7-litre V8 petrol/seven-speed automated manual/rear-wheel drive
- 321kW of power at 7300rpm/490Nm of torque at 5000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.5 seconds (claimed)
- 9.3L/100km highway; 19.2L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 299gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, leather, 19-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, six-stack CD player, USB port, rear parking sensors, alarm, tyre-pressure monitoring
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Jaguar F-Type V8 S, Nissan GTR, Porsche 911 Carrera S

AUDI **A1** FROM **$26,500**



The A1 is now exclusively a five door (Sportback in Audi-speak) bodystyle.

The base Attraction, at $26,500, runs a 63kW 1.2-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual.

Attraction (from $29,900) and Ambition (from $33,450) equipment levels are also both available with a 90kW/200Nm 1.4-litre direct-injection turbocharged TFSi petrol engine and six-speed manual drivetrain.

A seven-speed automated manual (S-Tronic in Audi-speak) adds $2350 to both 1.4-litre variants.

The 1.4TSi Sport, with the 136kW supercharged and turbocharged 1.4/seven-speed S-Tronic drivetrain, as used in the Polo GTi, is $39,900.

The S1 Sportback, with a 170kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine, six-speed manual, quattro all-wheel drive and claims of 0-100km/h in just 5.9 seconds, is $49,900.

The 66kW/230Nm 1.6-litre TDi turbodiesel, with a five-speed manual or seven-speed S-Tronic, costs $29,900/$32,250, the same as the 1.4-litre petrol Attraction.

The 1.6TDi is an honest, frugal slugger but, unless you're wedded to diesel or spend most of your drivetime cruising country highways, you'll find the 1.4 a much more enjoyable, refined and spirited device.

It reaches 100km/h in a claimed 8.9 seconds, compared with the diesel's 11.5 seconds.

The S-Tronic has Sport mode plus manual shifting with paddles on the wheel and it's a natural fit with the 1.4-litre engine.

Both engines deliver outstanding fuel efficiency and low emissions, assisted by an automatic stop/start system.

The 136kW engine in the Sport delivers remarkable tractability at low revs. Serious urge starts at 3500 or so, from where you're given another 3000rpm of punchy, sparkling performance, before the 1.4 starts to fade a little near the 7000rpm redline. It reaches 100km/h in 6.9 seconds.

Be aware, though, that this "Twincharger" engine has had its problems. VW dropped it for the current Golf.

In manual mode, S-Tronic gives you ultra-fast, seamless shifts every time.

An electronic limited-slip differential brakes the inside front wheel in hard cornering, minimising understeer. The A1 is light and well balanced, so it quickly settles and tracks nicely, pushing the front end hard but without giving up grip and running too wide under power.

The steering is light and intuitive but also a touch overassisted at speed, less precise and talkative than it should be. The ride, while OK in town, gets a bit choppy on rough open roads and the brakes could use more power.

Hop straight from the A1 into a Polo and you wouldn't pick the Audi's cabin as being any more expensive than the VW's. You're also short-changed on standard equipment, with stuff that should be standard, like iPod connectivity, packaged as expensive options.

Tick a few options boxes and its easy to push the A1's price to $60,000.

There's a comfortable and supportive driver's seat plus plenty of seat and steering wheel adjustment.

Rear-seat access, space and comfort are reasonable for a little hatch.

The boot floor is easily extended in length and depth. There's no spare underneath, just a compressor and a can of sealant.

The Attraction has 15-inch alloys, the Ambition wears 16-inchers and the Sport has 17s.

The A1 is a tight, enjoyable little car, but against some hot competition it's overpriced.

It makes no sense that the Sport, for example, should cost almost $10,000 more than the Polo GTi when they are essentially the same piece of machinery.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★☆☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Classic, clean Audi styling
- ✔ Flexible, fuel-efficient drivetrains
- ✔ Well-sorted ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Reasonable back seat space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ An overpriced Polo
- ✘ Under-equipped, with too many expensive options
- ✘ 1.4-litre Twincharger engine can cause grief

SPEX (1.4 S-Tronic)

- Made in Germany
- 1.4-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 90kW of power at 5000rpm/200Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h: 8.9 seconds (claimed)
- 4.6L/100km highway; 6.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 122gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, CD player, 15-inch alloy wheels, cruise control, Bluetooth, manual air-conditioning. Ambition adds 16-inch alloys and sports suspension
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

BMW 1 Series, Mercedes A Class, Mini, Renault Clio, VW Polo

AUDI **A3** FROM **$35,600**



Audi's current A3 range, like its predecessors, shares its architecture and most of its componentry with parent brand Volkswagen's Golf.

Prices for the five-door A3 Sportback start at $35,600 for the 90kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed automated twin-clutch manual S-Tronic Attraction.

The same engine, with 103kW and cylinder-on-demand technology, which automatically shuts down two cylinders under light loads to save fuel, is $38,200.

The 132kW 1.8-litre turbopetrol Ambition is $42,800; with Audi's quattro all-wheel drivetrain and a six-speed S-Tronic, it's $45,800.

Turbodiesels include the 77kW 1.6-litre six-speed S-Tronic Attraction, at $36,900, and the 110kW 2.0-litre Ambition, tested here, at $42,800.

Sedans start at $39,800 for the 1.4-litre/seven-speed S-Tronic Attraction, with cylinders on demand. The 1.8-litre Attraction is $45,100, the 2.0-litre turbodiesel Ambition is $45,200 and the 1.8-litre turbopetrol quattro Ambition is $48,100.

Cabrios start at $47,300 for the 103 kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol.

The 1.8-litre turbopetrol and 2.0-litre turbodiesel are both $51,900; the 1.8-litre turbopetrol quattro is $54,900.

The Audi cabin is a beautiful and efficient design, with a supportive, comfortable, part-leather-upholstered driver's seat, the absolute minimum of buttons and switches, a variety of high-quality, subtly-patterned plastics eschewing the usual clichéd shiny stuff — and an obvious emphasis on delighting the driver at every touch.

The back seat, though relatively narrow, is spacious and comfortable, with a deep, long cushion. Boot space in the hatch is also pretty good.

Like Golf VII, the latest A3 is up to 90kg lighter than its predecessor.

The benefits of this weight loss are confirmed on the road, where both the Audi and the Golf drive with great balance, poise and agility compared with their capable but doughy predecessors. On a country road they are untroubled by a poor surface and are very quiet.

No other hatchbacks offer this level of ride comfort, however if you fit optional 18-inch alloys with wide rubber, the ride can be a touch terse, while tyre noise on coarse chip bitumen is also intrusive.

VW's 2.0-litre turbodiesel is quiet and smooth, with class-leading fuel efficiency and a delivery that's initially gentle, then strengthens markedly between 2000-4000rpm.

In petrol territory, the 103kW 1.4 is beautifully smooth and stronger than its capacity suggests. Its ability to run on two cylinders sees it return just 4.7-litres/100km in official tests.

The 132kW 1.8 turbopetrol with either front-wheel or quattro drivetrains really suits the sporty flavour of this car, and the standard Drive Select system allows you to adjust the steering or engine/transmission alone, or together, across several settings.

S-Tronic has its usual irksome foibles in town.

The occasional delay when moving off from rest needs to be fixed, because it's potentially hazardous when manoeuvring or trying to quickly take advantage of a gap in traffic.

S-Tronic has also given some owners grief in previous models and in the Golf, where it's called DSG but is otherwise the same transmission, in six- and seven-speed iterations.

Otherwise, the latest A3 is a superb machine, albeit one that comes with a hefty price tag on the badge.

It's worth driving an equivalent Golf to see if the Audi makes a case for its higher prices. I don't think it does.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★½
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ This and Golf are the best hatchbacks on the market
- ✔ Beautiful, comfortable, spacious cabin
- ✔ Great dynamics and a smooth ride
- ✔ Responsive, refined, fuel-efficient engines

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ The big price premium over an equivalent Golf
- ✘ S-Tronic transmission has its quirks and can be temperamental
- ✘ Expensive to service
- ✘ Reliability issues with VW Group cars in general
- ✘ Rear camera not standard

SPEX (Ambition 2.0TDi)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed S-Tronic/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 3500rpm/320Nm of torque from 1750-3000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.4 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 4.1L/100km highway; 5.4L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 119gkm
- Standard: seven airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, tyre pressure monitor, dual-zone air, Bluetooth with audio streaming; Ambition adds 17-inch alloys, sports seats, Drive Select, sports steering wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...

Alfa Giulietta, BMW 1 Series, Mercedes A Class, Peugeot 308, Volvo V40, VW Golf

AUDI **S3** FROM **$59,000**



Audi's S3 Sportback is priced at $59,900, an $11,300 discount on the previous model. This reflects the fact that the premium performance hatchback class is now much more competitive than it once was, with rivals such as BMW's M135i, Mercedes A45 AMG and the Renault Megane RS265/RS275 all giving the Audi a run for its money.

Then there's the MkVII VW Golf R, priced at $51,990. Yes, the Golf is basically the same car, with an even sportier flavour (19-inch wheels are standard, for example, wheras the S3 has 18s) and it does seem difficult to justify the $7910 price gap between the two.

Like the Golf, the S3 uses VW's EA888 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, with a six-speed manual (tested here) or a six-speed dual clutch automated manual S-Tronic transmission as a no cost option. The S3 sedan costs $62,200.

The engine's delivery is tractable and linear from 2500rpm; tuned as it is for power, it's also beset by some lag at lower revs.

Still, at 5.4 seconds to 100km/h, the manual is plenty quick, and unlike most turbos, which are spent by the time redline approaches, this one gains a nice muscular edge, with extra effort and verve, for the last 1500 rpm en route to the 6400rpm cutout.

The manual has a short throw, slipping smoothly into each gate with unerring precision and just the right amount of mechanical feel.

Adjustable dampers come standard in the Golf; in the Audi, you have to pay extra for them — albeit the more sophisticated magnetorheological units integrated into the Drive Select system, which adjusts engine responsivness, the S-Tronic shift where fitted and the steering ratio. Our test car ran standard suspension, firmer and 25 mm lower than the A3, which for a sports hatch was surprisingly plush and slightly underdamped at the front, causing some bounce in bumpy, tight corners.

The S3 gets Golf VII's strong, lightweight body, but it isn't a well-balanced car. It pushes the front end, feels nose heavy and needs a bit of work to hustle along — much like a front-wheel drive hatch. The electrically assisted steering is sharp — in part to counter these understeer characteristics — but in Dynamic mode, it's too heavy. Auto is more precise and responsive.

You can get on the power hard and early in corners, apply a bit of extra steering lock to keep the car turned and let that all-wheel grip launch the Audi out with no traction dramas whatsoever.

The ride is firm without being harsh, while the brakes are powerful and progressive.

The driver faces an A3 dash with a few adornments to signify the S3, including grey-faded instruments with white needles and numbers, a turbo-boost gauge, black rooflining and the obligatory S3 logos. Pedals are stainless steel.

A thin tablet slides in and out of the dash; it's a beautiful thing, but Audi's navigation system is slow and error-prone.

The driver's seat, embossed with the S3 logo and with an extendable cushion, could use more supportive bolstering on the back rest.

The S3 is a lot cheaper than it was, but a Golf R is just as competent and enjoyable. So is the Renault Megane RS265/RS275. In sedan territory, you would also want to test drive Subaru's WRX STi before making a decision.

The best drive, though, remains BMW's M135i. Sure, it's $5030 more expensive than the Audi, but worth every cent.





STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Quattro grip
- ✔ Punchy, responsive turbopower
- ✔ Smooth shifting manual
- ✔ Compliant suspension
- ✔ Spacious back seat and boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Nose heavy
- ✘ Underdamped front suspension
- ✘ Slow, error-prone navigation system
- ✘ Overpriced compared with the Golf R
- ✘ Driver's seat could be more supportive

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive
- 206kW of power from 5100-6500rpm/380Nm of torque from 1800-5100rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.4 seconds (claimed)
- 5.8L/100km highway; 9.1L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 162gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, navigation, automatic parking, rear camera, 18-inch alloy wheels with 225/40 front and 255/40 rear tyres, sports suspension, body kit, leather upholstery, heated front seats, Bluetooth with audio streaming, dual-zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 45%

compare with...

BMW M135i, Renault RS265/275, Subaru WRX STi, VW Golf R

AUDI **Q3** FROM **$42,300**



The Audi Q3 range opens with the 110kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol TFSi, with a six-speed twin-clutch S-Tronic transmission and front-wheel drive, priced at $42,300.

Quatrro all-wheel drive models start with the 103kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel/seven-speed S-Tronic TDi at $47,500.

The high-performance 2.0-litre turbodiesel, with 130kW, is $55,000.

Base petrol model is the 125kW 2.0-litre TFSi seven-speed S-Tronic quattro, at $49,450.

The 155kW 2.0-litre TFSi quattro manual is $56,500.

The numbers suggest that you're not that much better off if you choose the more powerful version of the 2.0-litre turbodiesel, particularly in real-world driving.

It's got a sizeable power advantage, but this is at pretty high revs, where you rarely go in a turbodiesel. Its 60Nm torque advantage (380Nm vs 320Nm) can be felt more readily in the midrange, but the base engine is impressively tractable. The 130kW engine develops a smooth, sweet, free-revving nature from 3000-5000rpm and S-Tronic is more responsive, though in Sport mode it often holds a selected lower gear for too long.

That said, having driven at least 50 VW Group cars with the six- and seven-speed dual clutch transmissions, each one seems to have its own idiosyncrasies. Call it character.

The Q3 isn't as capable in corners as BMW's X1. Ride comfort is fine on standard 17-inch wheels. A second test car, on optional 19s, was terrible. The ride was lumpy around town and occasionally crashy and harsh, causing body shake on particularly severe bumps. The electric steering offers no road feel, has a vague, disconnected character and is prone to constant, annoying kickback on rough surfaces.

The dash features Audi's MMI media interface, here with the optional navigation system, and a pop-up screen.

It's not the fastest navigation in the world and you can sometimes be past your turn before an instruction is given. Moving around the MMI system, with the rotary cursor knob, here in a vertical position on the dash rather than on the flat centre console between the front seats, is also quite counterintuitive.

The back seat has a firm, flat, comfortable cushion that suits child restraints; two conventional anchors on the seat back, plus two sets of Isofix mounts, are provided.

Legroom is on the tight side but most adults will be able to travel comfortably.

The Q3's coupe-like rear styling compromises boot volume, so although the floor is reasonably large, you can't carry that much stuff and in extended mode it's not flat either.

The Q3 is expensive, especially when you consider that the same engineering DNA with a Skoda Yeti or VW Tiguan badge, or Mazda's classy CX5 diesel can be had for less. Despite its sharp Audi suit, the Q3 can't hide its humble VW origins on the road.

The hotrod of the range, the RS Q3, is priced at $81,900. It's got serious stick: a 228kW 2.5-litre five-cylinder turbopetrol, but now faces serious competition from the Mercedes-Benz GLA 45 AMG.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green
Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Class-leading quality and a beautifully assembled interior
- ✔ All four engines are excellent in performance and economy
- ✔ High resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Expensive
- ✘ Vague, remote-control steering
- ✘ Steering kickback on rough roads
- ✘ Too many expensive options
- ✘ Hard ride on optional 19-inch wheels
- ✘ High servicing costs and some reliability issues

SPEX (2.0TDI quattro S-Tronic)

- Made in Spain
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 130kW of power at 4200rpm/380Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.2 seconds (claimed)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.0L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 156gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- The 130kW 2.0TDi quattro (and 155kW 2.0TFSi quattro) includes stability control, six airbags, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, rain-sensing wipers, automatic headlights, roof rails, dual-zone air, Bluetoooth with audio streaming, fake and real leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 46%

compare with...

BMW X1, Mazda CX5, Mercedes GLA, Range Rover Evoque

AUDI **A7 SPORTBACK** FROM **$136,750**



Audi's Sportback body style works beautifully on the A7, a car that's nearly as long in the wheelbase as the A8 limo and offers comparable interior space, but comes with significantly lower pricetags.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety **Not yet tested**	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★½☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

It shares much of its architecture and running gear with the mid-sized A6. Drivetrains are also shared: a 180kW 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel TDi, priced at $135,750, a 230kW 3.0-litre V6 Bi-turbodiesel at $149,600 and the 220kW 3.0-litre supercharged petrol V6 TFSi, at $145,300. Quattro all-wheel drive and a seven-speed automated manual with stop/start are standard.

The S7, with a 309kW 4.0-litre V8, is $179,900.

Like the A6, the A7's dynamics benefit from relatively lightweight construction (with 30 per cent aluminium components), centralised mass and electromechanical power steering.

The A7 is an agile and involving drive, in a class where size and weight usually mitigate against a high enjoyment factor. The S7, though, is less convincing. Performance is ample, whatever engine you choose.

The A7 features a beautifully crafted interior and reasonable space in the back seat.

The standard driver's seat, though, is a plank. You'll have to head to the options list for a supportive, comfortable chair.

A few tall people will find rear-seat headroom restrictive, while the low, coupe-style roof also compromises boot volume.

If you can live with these impracticalities, the A7 is a stylish, engaging and reasonably-priced alternative to any $200,000-plus German rival.

The 412kW/700Nm 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8/eight-speed automatic RS7 Sportback is priced at $238,500.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Sharp price for a big limo
- ✔ Looks absolutely gorgeous
- ✔ Punchy, fuel-efficient engines
- ✔ Engaging dynamics
- ✔ Superb interior finish

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Restricted rear-seat headroom
- ✘ Restricted boot volume
- ✘ Uncomfortable driver's seat
- ✘ S7's nervous, unbalanced dynamics

SPEX (3.0V6 S/C)
- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre V6 supercharged petrol/seven-speed S-tronic/all-wheel drive
- 220kW of power at 5250rpm/440Nm of torque from 2900-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.6L/100km highway; 10.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 190gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, leather, tyre pressure monitoring, Bluetooth, navigation, power tailgate, sunroof, adaptive xenon headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...
BMW Gran Coupe, Jaguar XJ, Mercedes CLS, Porsche Panamera

AUDI **RS5** FROM **$156,400**



Audi's RS5 goes up against BMW's upcoming M4 and Mercedes E63AMG, so it's got to be better than good. Brilliance will only just suffice.

Its 4.2-litre atmo V8, with 331kW and 430Nm, drives four wheels via a seven-speed twin clutch S-Tronic transmission and a mechanical centre diff.

Both inside wheels can be braked in a corner and, if things get willing, an active rear diff will also fire more torque to the outside rear.

So you have several systems which are basically there to counter understeer — and this they do convincingly, as long as you get the RS5 turned in early, hard and are then quick and purposeful on the fast pedal.

The 4.2 rewards you with a serious lunge from about 4000rpm or so. It fairly honks from here to 8250rpm, and this is where it shows its unique character, being one of the last atmo V8s holding out against turbo power in a current model Euro blaster. It's an absolutely glorious engine.

The RS5 is a big, heavy coupe, with firm suspension and lots of rubber on the road.

So it's not a point and fire device, however it is certainly very capable in corners and the faster you go the better it gets. The ride is GT-style compliant and comfortable.

If you prefer open-top motoring, the RS5 cabriolet, at $176,400 with the same drivetrain and specification, will get you around in fine style. There's a bit of body shake, but that's normal and like the coupe its ride and handling actually improve as speeds rise. The softop also yields a useful-sized boot.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety Not yet tested	Quality and reliability ★★★★½
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ A first-class GT way to fly
- ✔ Rev-happy atmo V8 is a peach
- ✔ Luxurious cabin
- ✔ Gorgeous to look at
- ✔ Usable boot in cabrio

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ It's big, heavy and a touch ponderous in tighter corners
- ✘ Tight back seat
- ✘ Driver's seat could be better bolstered
- ✘ Audi's navigation system has a few glitches in it.

SPEX (Coupe)
- Made in Germany
- 4.2-litre atmo V8 petrol/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 331kW of power at 8250rpm/430Nm of torque from 4000-6000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.5 seconds (claimed)
- 8.3L/100km highway; 14.4L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 246gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, Data Dot security, tyre-pressure monitoring, alarm, front and rear parking sensors, 19-inch alloy wheels, rear camera, sunroof, swivelling bi-xenon headlights, leather upholstery, navigation, Bluetooth
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...
BMW M4, Mercedes C63AMG

AUDI **A4** FROM **$55,500**



Audi's A4 range opens with the 125kW 1.8-litre direct-injection turbocharged petrol/continuously variable transmission — 1.8 TFSi Multitronic in Audi-speak — front-wheel drive, at $55,500 for the sedan or $58,500 for the Avant S-Line wagon.

The 130kW 2.0-litre direct-injection turbodiesel/seven-speed twin-clutch automated manual S-Tronic quattro sedan is $59,900.

The 1.8 TFSi petrol engine cruises quietly and easily through traffic or on the highway, but its 2.0-litre rivals from BMW and Mercedes are slightly more powerful.

The 165kW 2.0-litre turbo quattro/six-speed manual TFSi sedan is priced at $57,100. The price rises to $59,900 for the seven-speed automated manual S-Tronic or $62,900 for the Avant.

The 2.0-litre turbopetrol hauls like a tractor from low revs and just keeps pouring it on, with impeccable smoothness and deceptive ease, to 6000rpm.

The 2.0TFSi's telling advantages are S-Tronic and quattro. The former gives you fast, smooth shifts, in S mode or in a nanosecond when you flick a shift paddle.

Quattro allows you to get on the gas, as hard as you like, when driving out of a corner, while the car stays welded to the road. As a bonus, the A4 also has a comfortable, compliant ride. Its suspension works much better on Australian roads than BMW's underdamped, lightly-sprung 3 Series.

The current model's electric steering was another step forward. It's lighter, more responsive and consistent in feel than the previous A4's hydraulic system.

When it bites and the car turns, the body stays flat and properly balanced, while the suspension deals with whatever rubbish the road throws at it. You have to go in very hard, fast and deep to induce the sort of understeer you used to get in an A4 when you weren't even trying. The brakes are superb.

You can choose adjustable suspension as an option in the A4 but the standard setup works just as well 99 per cent of the time.

Audi's cockpit-style dash layout is quite traditional in style and everything is easy to find. Fit and finish quality are outstanding.

There's plenty of front-seat travel for long-legged drivers and height/reach adjustment for the wheel.

Rear-seat legroom is OK for most adults, but slightly tighter than a BMW 3 Series or Mercedes C Class.

As usual from Audi, the boot is huge and has a 60/40 split-fold rear-seat extension.

The A4 lineup also includes a130kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel front-wheel drive Multitronic at $57,900 ($60,900 Avant) and a 180kW 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel quattro variant at $88,000.

The 200kW 3.0-litre supercharged V6 quattro S-Tronic is $92,900.

The Avant range also includes the 130kW 2.0-litre TDi quattro S-Tronic allroad, with higher clearance, at $70,500.

Top spec sedan is the 245kW 3.0-litre V6 supercharged S4, at $105,000. The S4 Avant is $108,500.

The rocket-like RS4 Avant, with the same 331kW naturally-aspirated 4.2-litre V8 screamer as the RS5 is $149,400.

An all new Audi A4 range is due in 2015.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ 2.0TFSi quattro is a cracker
- ✔ Responsive, fuel-efficient engines
- ✔ Good interior space
- ✔ Quattro handling and grip

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Base models are no match for the Mercedes C Class

SPEX (2.0 TFSi quattro)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre direct-injection turbopetrol/seven-speed S-Tronic/all-wheel drive
- 165kW of power from 4500-6250rpm/350Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.4 seconds
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.5L/100km city. 95 octane premium. CO2 emissions are 155gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, electric parking brake, 18-inch alloy wheels, navigation, automatic air, Bluetooth, rain-sensing wipers, xenon headlights.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

BMW 3 Series, Mercedes C Class, Infiniti Q50, Lexus IS, Volvo S60

The easiest place to find your next car

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

AUDI **Q7** FROM **$90,500**



The 2014 Q7 is available with a 3.0-litre V6 direct-injection supercharged petrol engine as used in the S4 and S5, which produces 245kW of power and 440Nm of torque. This model, priced at $95,700, is the only petrol variant. Like the two turbodiesels, it runs an eight-speed automatic as standard.

The base model is the 176kW/550Nm 3.0 V6 turbodiesel at $90,500. The 250kW/800Nm 4.2-litre V8 turbodiesel is $129,300.

The 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel delivers exactly the sort of performance that a behemoth like this needs, while the introduction of the eight-speed automatic yielded a fuel consumption improvement of nearly 20 per cent. Check the fuel numbers in the Spex panel at right — they're pretty amazing for a 2.3-tonne SUV that is also claimed to hit 100km/h in just 7.9 seconds.

Conventional suspension is standard on the two V6s; adaptive air suspension is fitted to the V8 turbodiesel.

Air suspension is a $5900 option on V6s. It provides markedly superior ride comfort, body control and roadholding and is a box worth ticking.

The Q7 is a determined understeerer and a bit of a barge compared with BMW's X5 or the Porsche Cayenne. That said, its ride comfort is infinitely superior to the BMW, while the Porsche is expensive and has five seats only.

Seven seats are standard in the Audi. The elevated middle bench has plenty of legroom but the centre position is uncomfortable. There's a lot more room in the back stalls than there is in BMW's X5, though.

They are sufficiently spacious for kids up to mid-teens and when folded away there's a vast boot to fill.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ The 3.0 TDi is the pick of them
- ✔ Great economy
- ✔ Acres of space inside
- ✔ Back seats are OK

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Push it and it starts to throw its weight around
- ✘ Middle seat is shaped for two
- ✘ Expensive options
- ✘ High load floor

SPEX (3.0-litre V6 TDi)
- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre direct-injection turbodiesel V6/six-speed sequential automatic/all-wheel drive
- 176kW of power at 4000rpm/550Nm of torque at 2000-2250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.9 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city. CO^2 emissions are 205gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven seats, stability control, eight airbags, front and rear parking assistance, rear-view camera, Data Dot security, 18-inch alloy wheels, full-size spare, in-dash CD player, USB and auxiliary inputs, Bluetooth. dual-zone automatic air, trip computer and leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...
BMW X5, Porsche Cayenne, Mercedes GL, Range Rover Sport

AUDI **R8** FROM **$279,500**



The Audi R8 shares components with the Lamborghini Huracan.

The R8 Coupe is available with the 386kW 5.2-litre V10, at $366,900, and the 316kW 4.2-litre V8, at $279,500, the latter with a six-speed manual. A seven-speed S-Tronic box adds $8500 to the V8; it's standard with the V10.

The top spec Coupe V10 Plus, with 404kW, is $408,200. It gets ceramic brakes and is the fastest production car Audi has built, cracking the 0-100km/h sprint in just 3.5 seconds en route to a top speed of 317km/h.

The manual V8 Spyder is $308,400; the S-Tronic is $315,900. The V10 Spyder, as tested, is $395,800.

It uses an aluminium spaceframe, double wishbones and adjustable magnetorheological dampers, like the coupe.

The roof takes about 20 seconds to raise or lower and you can do this at speeds up to 50km/h.

Peak torque of 530Nm kicks in at a high 6500rpm, so you have to administer the big stick to get the V10 really interested. At Phillip Island it felt like it could circulate all day with the tacho sitting as close to 8000rpm as possible.

Audi has calibrated the all-wheel-drive system to send 85 per cent to the rear. If you didn't know you were in an all-wheel-drive car you wouldn't pick it.

That's basically the way the R8 handles too. It's the easiest supercar you'll ever drive and also the most comfortable, with a spacious, wrap-around style cabin that's beautifully designed and finished.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★½	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★½	★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Occupies the top echelon of performance machinery
- ✔ Engine, handling and that V10 sound
- ✔ Gorgeous to look at, inside and out
- ✔ Comfortable seats and logical control layout
- ✔ Superb quality

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Steering could use more road feel
- ✘ Resale values aren't quite in the Ferrari or Porsche 911 league

SPEX (Spyder 5.2 S-Tronic)
- Made in Germany
- 5.2-litre direct-injection V10/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 386kW of power at 8000rpm/530Nm of torque at 6500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 3.8 seconds (claimed)
- 9.2L/100km highway; 20.5L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 310gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, Data Dot security, alarm, front and rear parking sensors with rear camera, LED headlights, Nappa leather/Alcantara upholstery, 19-inch alloy wheels, tyre pressure monitoring, navigation, six-stack CD player and Bluetooth
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...
Aston Martin Vantage S, Lamborghini Huracan, Porsche 911

AUDI **A5** FROM **$68,200**



The Audi A5 Sportback is shaped like the coupe and identically priced, but it has four doors, its wheelbase is extended by 60mm for greater rear seat legroom and it's 86mm longer overall.

The range opens with the 125kW 1.8TFSi front-wheel drive CVT automatic, at $68,200. The 130kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel TDi is $69,700. Others in the range run a seven-speed S-Tronic automated manual and quattro all-wheel drive. You'll pay $77,300 for the 165kW 2.0-litre TFSi. This model is also available with a conventional six-speed manual at $75,400.

The 180kW 3.0TDi is $94,300 and the 200kW, 3.0-litre supercharged V6 TFSi is $99,300. The S5, with a 245kW 3.0-litre supercharged V6 as used in the S4, costs $119,900.

The 2.0-litre direct-injection turbo is arguably a better choice than the 3.0TDi, not just because you get $4600 change, but also because its free-revving, responsive nature better suits the Sportback and the fuel economy numbers for both are close enough to be a non-issue.

The 2.0-litre is also around 100kg lighter; all of this weight is up front, so the four cylinder feels more agile, precise and responsive.

It takes 6.6 seconds to drive the Sportback to 100km/h with either the manual or S-Tronic transmissions.

This engine, with a manual gearbox and Audi's all-wheel drive, is a very enjoyable, involving drive.

The 245kW supercharged 3.0-litre V6 in the S5 is a weapon. It goes harder than many V8s and hits 100km/h in just 5.1 seconds.

The Sportback is a tidy handler in standard specification.

The only reason you would tick the dynamic steering/drive select/adaptive suspension option would be to improve ride comfort.

Avoid the sport suspension option and the 19-inch alloys, unless you like being in severe pain as you drive.

It's the usual Audi corporate style in the Sportback's cabin. The driver's seat is comfortable and supportive, with sufficient travel for the tallest driver complemented by generous wheel reach adjustment. Vision is OK for a coupe.

If you want to run an iPod, you purchase a factory cable, which plugs into the glovebox.

Two SD card slots allow you to store music. Voice-controlled navigation and automatic parking are also standard.

The back seat in the Sportback has enough headroom and legroom for most adults.

The long, wide boot floor gives you ample acreage, but the raked roofline restricts overall volume compared with the cavernous boot space in Audi sedans.

Audi also offers the A5 as a cabriolet, priced from $80,700 for the 1.8-litre TFSi front wheel drive CVT. The 2.0-litre turbodiesel CVT is $82,800.

The seven-speed S-Tronic transmission and quattro are standard in the 2.0-litre turbopetrol ($90,500), 3.0-litre turbodiesel ($107,200), 3.0-litre supercharged V6 ($111,400) and S5 cabrio ($129,900).

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The body beautiful
- ✔ Top range of engines
- ✔ The 2.0TFSi is good value
- ✔ Reasonable back seat and boot space for a coupe-style car
- ✔ Excellent roadholding and stability

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Hard ride, especially at low speeds
- ✘ Expensive options
- ✘ Road noise and coarseness
- ✘ Space-saver spare

SPEX (2.0 TFSi quattro)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbocharged four cylinder/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 165kW of power at 4500–6250rpm/350Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium, CO^2 emissions are 155gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, tri-zone air, leather upholstery, parking sensors, automatic parking, rear camera, voice controlled navigation, Bluetooth and 18-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...

BMW 3/4 Series, Lexus IS, Mercedes CLA, Volvo S60

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



Value your car quick & easy online now

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY

AUDI **A6** FROM **$77,900**



Audi's A6 sedan and wagon have become serious rivals to the BMW 5 Series and the Mercedes-Benz E Class.

This A6, launched in 2011, is significantly lighter and better balanced than previous models, thanks to more even weight distribution, increased use of lightweight, high-strength steels and an aluminium content of 20 per cent, including in most suspension components, doors and body panels.

Six engines are available, all with automatic stop/start as standard. Two front-wheel-drive, four-cylinder A6 models take on the base E Class and 5 Series at the $80,000 pricepoint.

The 2.0TDi turbodiesel, with 130kW/380Nm and combined fuel consumption of just 4.9 litres per 100 kilometres, costs $79,500.

The 2.0TFSi turbopetrol, with 132kW/320Nm, is $77,900. Both use Audi's Multitronic continuously variable automatic transmission and are also available as Avant wagons, priced at $81,800 and $83,500 respectively.

The 2.8FSi direct-injection petrol V6 sedan, priced at $91,900, produces a meek and mild 150kW of power and 280Nm of torque.

The 3.0 TFSi sedan, at $115,300, runs a 3.0-litre supercharged V6 with 220kW and 440Nm. It can hit 100km/h in a claimed 5.5 seconds.

The VW Group's refined, muscular 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel, with 180kW/500Nm and average fuel consumption of 6.0 litres per 100 kilometres, sits in the middle of the range, with a price tag of $108,400. In the faux SUV Allroad wagon, it's $117,900. The twin turbodiesel version, with 230kW, is $119,700 in the top of the range sedan.

This A6 flows naturally through a corner; previous models put up fierce resistance to any deviation from a straight trajectory. Ride comfort on the standard suspension and base model 18-inch wheels is fine; optional air suspension and 19- or 20-inch alloys with lower profile tyres would be questionable value.

The two 3.0-litre V6s have more than enough performance. The supercharged petrol engine needs a few revs on board to ignite the afterburners and pin the horizon to the bonnet.



The diesel's more accessible, "go softly with a big stick" delivery is persuasive because it comes at no cost to refinement and you get 26 per cent better fuel economy.

The front section of the cabin is a premium-quality, down-to-business space — as usual from Audi — with bright, informative instruments, reasonable storage and intuitive controls.

A big screen, on which navigation, audio and other systems are displayed with perfect clarity, slides elegantly out of the dash when you start the car. Bluetooth is standard, though without audio streaming.

Rear-seat legroom is fine for most adults, comparable with the 5 Series and slightly tighter than the E Class, which also has the biggest boot.

Unless you're moving house, though, boot space isn't an issue in any of these cars.

The rampaging RS6 Avant with a twin turbo 4.0-litre V8 that produces 412kW and 700Nm, hits 100km/h in just 3.9 seconds and tops out at 305km/h, is $225,000. Just the tool for the school run.

An updated A6 range, with more fuel efficient drivetrains and new infotainment systems, arrives here in March.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Superb 3.0 V6 turbodiesel
- ✔ Much-improved handling, steering and ride
- ✔ Outstanding design and quality in the cabin
- ✔ Big boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Driver's seat is shapeless and unsupportive
- ✘ No audio streaming
- ✘ Bland exterior styling
- ✘ The 5 Series is more involving to drive and the E Class is more comfortable
- ✘ Resale values are terrible

SPEX (3.0V6 TDI)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/seven-speed S-Tronic/all-wheel drive
- 180kW of power at 4000rpm/500Nm of torque from 1400-3250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 158gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloys, leather, tyre pressure monitoring, Bluetooth, navigation, S-Line exterior trim
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...

BMW 5 Series, Lexus GS, Mercedes E Class

AUDI **Q5** FROM **$62,200**



A parent's search for the perfect family SUV is a quest for that "just right" moment, when you open the door, like what you see, picture the billy lids safe and happy in the back seat and realise that this is the one. Audi's Q5 has indeed been exactly that for many parents around the world and it leads the mid-size premium SUV field.

The Q5 2.0 TDi turbodiesel quattro is $62,200 and the 2.0 TFSi turbopetrol quattro is $63,600. The 3.0 V6 TFSi petrol quattro is $75,000 and the 3.0 V6 TDi turbodiesel quattro is $76,100.

The SQ5, with a 230kW 3.0-litre V6 twin turbopetrol, is $90,600.

It's got more stomp than a herd of elephants, but the 2.0-litre petrol engine delivers willing and pretty rapid performance too.

The 3.0 V6 TDi is a mighty thing with an effortless surge of torque. At 110km/h, it pulls just 1700rpm in seventh gear, but stunning overtaking performance is available with just a squeeze of the right pedal.

All four engines are refined, fuel-efficient and tractable, but I had forgotten how wonderfully responsive a supercharged petrol engine can be when compared with its turbo-charged counterpart.

The V6 3.0 TFSi leaps into its work at the lightest touch of the pedal and is now the best performance drive in this class.

Petrol engines are matched with an eight-speed Tiptronic; diesels with a seven-speed S-Tronic. Quattro is standard, obviously, and all models have automatic stop/start.

Audi has now made Dynamic Drive standard on what was already a tidy handling package.

It alters engine/transmission and/or electromechanical power steering settings across Efficiency, Comfort, Auto, Dynamic and Individual modes.

Light, precise EPS works well here. I don't get the point, though, of simply adding weight at the push of a button and somehow trying to pretend it's a "sportier" setup. Dynamic mode just feels like the front tyres are going flat.

Previously, you may have considered the adaptive damper option worthwhile; now, it's a questionable spend.

BMW's X3 was the best handling SUV in this class. The Audi is equally competent now, and the bonus is a much more comfortable ride plus lower noise levels in the cabin.

The Q5 has an attractive, efficient, cockpit-style dash layout, similar in design to the A6, that has everything within easy reach of the driver.

As usual with Audi, fit, finish and material quality is outstanding.

Servicing costs are high though. How does $400 just for transmission oil sound?

The back seat is spacious and comfortable. It has side and curtain airbags (rivals have only curtains), the seat is adjustable and you can flip and fold it in any 40/20/40 arrangement you choose.

A low, easy-to-load floor can be easily accessed via a power-operated tailgate.

You can fit plenty of gear in the Q5 because the rear-end design doesn't overly compromise volume or the ability to carry bulky objects.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Base models are sharply priced
- ✔ Powerful, efficient drivetrains
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Plenty of space
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No camera in 2.0-litre models
- ✘ Servicing is expensive
- ✘ Space-saver spare
- ✘ Audi reliability isn't quite what it should be

SPEX (2.0 TFSi)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 165kW of power at 4500–6250rpm/350Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.1 seconds
- 6.9L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium, CO^2 emissions are 184gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, a mix of real and fake leather upholstery, 18-inch alloys, parking sensors, tri-zone air, rain-sensing wipers, xenon headlights, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 45%

compare with...

BMW X3, Lexus RX, Range Rover Evoque, Volvo XC60

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



The latest new car deals & special offers

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

BMW 1 SERIES FROM $36,900



BMW'S 1 Series is now the only small hatchback in the world that still uses rear-wheel drive. Is this a big deal?

BMW says it is, of course. Its argument is that rear-wheel drive produces a better-balanced car that has more neutral handling characteristics and steering that's uncorrupted by the engine's torque interfering with the front wheels, as is the case on front-wheel-drive layouts.

However, BMW also makes the front-wheel-drive Mini and 2 Series Active Tourer, the first front wheel drive to wear a BMW badge. It's strangely quiet on the advantages of rear-wheel drive when spruiking these cars.

The major attraction of rear-wheel drive is totally natural steering. The 1 Series points into and out of corners with responsiveness and precision you just don't get when the engine's torque is trying to turn the front wheels as well.

It's also one of the most delicately balanced, wonderfully controllable cars on the road.

The range opens with the 100kW version of the 1.6 turbo petrol, the 116i, which costs $36,900. A 105kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel is used in the $43,000 118d.

The 125kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol 118i is also $43,000.

The 160kW, 2.0-litre turbopetrol 125i is priced at $48,000. As far as bang for your bucks goes, that's excellent value.

An eight-speed automatic and automatic stop/start are standard. In the 118d the auto delivered remarkably low fuel numbers by keeping the engine parked in its 1500–3000rpm sweet spot.

At 100km/h in eighth gear, it's ticking over at just 1500rpm, returning 4.0–4.5 litres per 100 kilometres.

It's no ball of fire from a standing start, but there's a wide, strong spread of midrange torque so when you need responsive performance for overtaking it really gets up and goes.

The 125i is great value for a genuine performance BMW. At under $50,000, you get 160kW of power — the same output once delivered by BMW's revered 3.0-litre naturally-aspirated straight six — and a wonderfully engaging experience that only a well set up rear wheel drive can offer.

In a small, light hatch like this, 160kW is more than enough power to enjoy, and there's none of the nose heaviness of the previous six-cylinder models.

Inside, the One feels intimate and driver focused, like a real BMW. The dash features a wide, fixed tablet-style screen with audio, navigation and phone menus, accessed via iDrive.

The Sport Line option is good value at $1430-$2080. It includes more supportive, comfortable sports seats and a leather-wrapped sports steering wheel, black interior trim with red highlights and stylish 17-inch alloy wheels.

There's plenty of space and adjustability in the front; rear seat legroom, though better than before, is still tight.

It's always going to be a squeeze in a small rear driver's back stalls because you have a driveshaft, diff and other bulky bits under the floor. Boot space is reasonable, though.

Runflat tyres are standard. I drove the One in New Zealand and Europe.

In both places you'll find much smoother roads than most of Australia. Ride comfort was fine there but here it may be a bit harsh, as runflats can be on other BMWs.

Otherwise, the One is a beautiful little car to drive, in large part due to its rear wheel drive layout, and comes highly recommended.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Superb balance and agility
- ✔ Precise steering
- ✔ Strong, frugal 2.0 turbodiesel
- ✔ Refined, efficient eight-speed auto
- ✔ Sport Line option is good value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Runflats don't work in Australia
- ✘ Tight back seat
- ✘ Restricted rear vision

SPEX (118d)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 105kW of power at 4000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1750–2500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 8.9 seconds
- 4.0L/100km highway; 5.5L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 119gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, Bluetooth, USB connectivity, CD player, cloth upholstery, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, dual-zone air, rain sensing wipers
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Audi A3, Alfa Giulietta, Mercedes A Class, VW Golf, Volvo V40

BMW **2 SERIES** FROM **$51,000**



Remember the 2002 of the 1960s? It's where modern BMW began. Boxy yet sporty, the compact two-door sedan was the precursor to the first 3 Series of 1975, establishing the brand as 'The Ultimate Driving Machine'.

Now the Bavarian carmaker is keen to cash in on the 2002's cache with the new F22 2 Series Coupe. The range kicks off from $51,000 for the 135kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol 220i, or $53,000 for the identically specified 135kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel 220d.

The 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol 228i is $64,400 while the $79,930 M235i (covered separately in this issue) is the only six-cylinder variant on offer.

Proving there's nothing new under the sun, the F22 actually follows on from the conceptually identical E82 1 Series Coupe, now discontinued. Though familiar-looking, every panel is different, with subtly more tapered proportions thanks to a faster windscreen rake, (slightly) lower roof, longer wheelbase, wider tracks and shorter overhangs for a sleeker overall stance.

An appreciably larger and roomier cabin imparts an airier and more welcoming feel than the 1 Series. Happily, the old scratchy plastics give way to more premium materials. The dash might look like every other BMW's but the newfound quality is appreciated.

Staying on-brand, the F22's driving position is superb, with flawless instrumentation, a now-intuitive iDrive controller for the various infotainment functions and simple to navigate switchgear.

Backing all that up are excellent front seats, a pair of twin rear perches that's just fine for occasional adult occupation and a boot of surprising volume — aided by a split/fold function to expand capacity. Beware, though, that vinyl upholstery makes a comeback, as "Sensatec". Is BMW taking the '60s 2002 theme too far? Leather adds an additional $2200.

The 220i Coupe is anything but a base performer. Powered by a 2.0-litre TwinPower single-turbo unit, it delivers a healthy 135kW of power from a heady 5000-6250rpm and 270Nm of torque between 1250-4500rpm.

Despite the modest outputs, the lean (from 1365kg) 220i Coupe feels lithe and lively from the word go, leaping off the mark with a crisp and satisfying throttle action.

That only the eight-speed automatic version was made available on the Australian launch shows how confident BMW is with the TwinPower engine, for it soars through the rev range with seamless flexibility.

Yet the 220d's 135kW/380Nm 2.0-litre turbo-diesel also holds appeal. Though a tad turbo-lag tardy at take-off, effortless and quiet acceleration is there for the taking once the engine dives into its deep well of torque.

In either model, from the first corner it is abundantly clear how tight and focussed the reworked 1 Series Hatch-based rear-drive chassis is, with a level of (electric) steering feel and response missing from some recent BMW offerings, notably the 3 Series.

Armed with a 50:50 weight balance, the 220i in particular handles with the sort of driver engagement and tactility reserved for serious sports cars like the Porsche Cayman.

Other than the overly firm ride quality on the optional 18-inch alloys, accompanied by some tyre noise, the beguiling new 2 Series Coupe leaves a lasting sweet impression.

However Munich is only half right in evoking the old 2002, for the legendary E46 3 Series Coupe from the early 2000s is probably the F22's true inspiration.

BMW's Ultimate Driving Machine is back!

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Top-shelf BMW dynamics
- ✔ High quality, comfortable interior
- ✔ Efficient, responsive drivetrains
- ✔ Striking good looks
- ✔ Sporty driving position

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Expensive options
- ✘ Firm ride on larger wheel/tyre options
- ✘ Road noise intrusion over some surfaces

SPEX (220i)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol/eight-speed automatic/ rear-wheel drive
- 135kW of power from 5000-6250rpm/270Nm of torque from 1250-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.0 seconds (claimed)
- 4.8L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 139g/km
- Warranty: three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, manual or automatic transmissions, navigation, automatic air, rear parking sensors, tyre pressure monitoring, 17-inch alloys, Bluetooth with audio streaming and voice control, fog lights and automatic stop/start
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...

Audi A3/S3, Mercedes-Benz A250 Sport, Volkswagen Golf R/Scirocco R, Volvo V40

BMW **M135i** FROM **$64,930**



BMW's M badge used to adorn only its elite performance cars, such as the M3 and M5, but M also stands for Money and now BMW is cashing in on its badge cachet.

A second tier of M models, called M Performance, now sits below the weapons-grade hardware.

In addition to the usual M Sport option pack for standard BMWs, which includes an aerodynamic body kit, stiffer suspension, bespoke 18-inch alloy wheels, body-hugging sports seats, a fat-rimmed steering wheel and a pukka man-cave interior with M signature blue and red details, M Performance cars also give you some, but not all, of the serious go-fast engineering bits that make a 100 per cent M such a thrilling drive.

The M135i, which costs $64,930, adds a lovely, loud exhaust, variable-ratio electric steering, big brakes with four-piston front calipers and sticky tyres, with fatter rubber on the rear.

An eight-speed automatic, with paddles, is standard; a six-speed manual is a no cost option.

The M135i runs BMW's 3.0-litre turbocharged straight six, the same engine as the limited run 1 Series M Coupe, though here with 15kW less power.

Still, with 235kW and a mighty 450Nm of turbo-torque, available from 1300rpm, the M135i smokes the 100km/h dash in 5.1 seconds. The automatic clocks 4.9 seconds.

The M135i also features four push-button drivetrain modes, from gentle, frugal ECO (with automatic engine stop/start) to let 'er rip Sport+ and an active rear differential that can brake an individual wheel to keep the car tidy and adhesive in corners.

The options list includes internet connectivity via your mobile phone.

The 1 Series polarises opinion. Some love it; others say its proportions are all wrong, especially that l-o-n-g nose, which on the M135i features gaping air vents.

Gunmetal alloys, blue enamel brake calipers, a rear diffuser and dark window tinting complete a tough, stylish package.

The exquisite balance, agility and poise of the four-cylinder 1 Series — BMW's best handling car — are not compromised by the bigger, heavier engine.

The M135i will leave most front-wheel drive or all-wheel drive "hot hatch" rivals facing a cold reality as it disappears up the road. Only Mercedes' A45 AMG will worry it.

The ride is surprisingly comfortable, in part due to the use of conventional tyres instead of runflats.

The engine pulls hard from idle then relentlessly piles on the revs, accompanied by a luscious soundtrack that urges you towards the 7000rpm redline.

The auto's shifts are fast, crisp and smooth in Sport mode, but in the M, your fingers can hardly resist a play with the paddles on the wheel.

It just seems like the right thing to do.

OK, there's now M... and M, but at the price the M135i is close enough to the real deal, and if you missed out on the limited run 2011/2012 1 Series M Coupe, in this model you'll get a car that's just as capable, quick and enjoyable to drive.

The M135i is also $15,000 cheaper than the M235i coupe, which has exactly the same drivetrain with five kilowatts more power. That's $3000 per kilowatt.

Which car do you think is the better deal?

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★★
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Great value
- ✔ A superb performance and handling package
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Tight back seat space
- ✘ Not much else to whinge about

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre straight six turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/rear wheel drive
- 235kW of power at 5800rpm/450Nm of torque from 1250-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.9 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.8L/100km highway; 10.3L/100km city; 98 octane; CO2 emissions are 175gkm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, M Sport brakes, 18-inch alloy wheels, high performance 225/40 (front) and 245/35 (rear) tyres, sports seats, leather upholstery, M suspension, M body kit, M steering wheel, bi-xenon headlights, Bluetooth, voice control
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Audi S3, Mercedes A45 AMG

BMW **M235I** FROM **$79,930**



A new hierarchy has emerged within BMW, starting off with the normal production vehicles, rising to the 'M Performance' brand, and then topping out with the signature 'M' range.

Until the rumoured 'M2' gets the production nod (it's a certainty; the only issue is when) the M Performance M235i Coupe is the flagship of the new F22 2 Series Coupe range.

Priced from $79,930, it's the sole six-cylinder 2 Series model available. Its natural rivals are the Mercedes A45 AMG and Audi's S3.

The M235i adds to the 2 Series coupe specification a full body kit, different trim colours, unique 18-inch alloys and an upgraded brake package featuring four-piston fixed calipers up front and a two-piston set-up in the rear.

But it is what the folks at M Performance have done underneath that makes the greatest difference.

The M235i Coupe boasts BMW's iconic M-tuned 3.0-litre in-line six-cylinder engine — tuned here for 240kW of power from 5800-6000rpm and 450Nm of torque from 1300-4500rpm — for a stirring performance surge from the basement to the redline, accompanied by an equally evocative note.

Unless the six-speed manual is specially ordered, the default transmission, which carries no price premium, is a ZF eight-speed automatic fitted with Launch Control software.

It helps the rear-driven M235i reach 100km/h in just 4.8 seconds (some 0.2s faster than the manual though 0.4s shy of its Mercedes A45 AMG arch rival) on the way to an electronically speed-limited 250km/h.

While the M235i Coupe's performance puts it in Porsche Cayman S territory, this rapid point-to-point pocket-rocket is neither rabid nor uncouth in the way it does the business.

M Performance ditches the standard Servotronic electric rack and pinion steering for a variable ratio item that cuts turning effort by 25 per cent.

Also in the spec is BMW's effective Adaptive M suspension system, which brings a more extreme range of adjustable damper settings to improve both handling and ride.

Although the 220i Coupe is an engaging steer, the M Performance mods make the M235i's helm reactions immediately faster from the outset, turning in with the desired urgency promised by the potent exhaust soundtrack.

However it lacks the natural progressive feel of the more linear standard arrangement.

Meanwhile a mechanical limited-slip differential splits drive between the rear wheels for maximum traction.

The resulting grip available is quite something, allowing the M235i to carve through turns with exceptional precision and security. Additional reassurance is provided by brakes that refused to wither even after a pounding through the tight Baskerville race circuit near Hobart.

Finally, the ride quality is more compliant than in the lesser models – a corollary of the more sophisticated Adaptive M suspension tune.

However the M235i lacks the sheer lightness of touch that naturally elevates its incredibly agile 220i sibling to greatness — and for some drivers, the latter's seat-of-the-pants controllability makes it the more involving experience.

It also seems illogical that the M135i hatch, with the same drivetrain (minus just 5kW), much of the M chassis hardware and similar equipment levels to the M135i five-door hatch, should cost $15,000 less than the M235i coupe. It's yet another reason why the M135i is an absolute bargain.

Still, on the strength of the M235i, the M2 flagship ought to be a knockout. Bring it on.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★★
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Potent, flexible in-line turbo six
- ✔ Chassis poise and grip
- ✔ Excellent brakes
- ✔ Pukka sports interior
- ✔ Relative civility and comfort

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Why does it cost $15,000 more than the M135i?
- ✘ Not quite as agile or tactile as lighter 220i
- ✘ Inconsistent steering feel
- ✘ You really want an M2, right?

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 240kW of power at 5800-6000rpm/450Nm of torque at 1300-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.8 seconds (claimed)
- 6.4L/100km highway; 10.(L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 176g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, leather, M sports seats, M steering wheel, navigation, Bluetooth with audio streaming, smartphone internet connectivity, bi-xenon headlights, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Audi S3, Mercedes-Benz A45/CLA 45 AMG

BMW **Z4** FROM **$79,900**



The Z4 Roadster kicks off with the 130kW 2.0-litre four cylinder turbo sDrive20i. The 180kW version of the same engine in the sDrive28i is $89,900.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

A six-speed manual is standard. An eight-speed auto is a no cost option option on the 20i and 28i.

At $119,075, the 35is runs an M-tweaked version of the twin-turbo six that produces 250kW and up to 500Nm of torque with an overboost function.

It's also got the M Sport package and the seven-speed automated manual gearbox as standard.

If you drive the Z4 for what it has now become — a luxurious, GT-style roadster — then it works.

However, at 1.6 tonnes, the Z4 is not the light, agile roadster its soft top predecessor was, and has moved closer in character to the Mercedes SLK.

It feels nose heavy, pushes the front tyres hard and, under power, the back end also struggles to convert all that grunt into forward progress.

That said, when you lean on the pedal in the 35is, that long bonnet does head for the horizon very quickly.

The trick to enjoying the Z4 is to ease back into the sumptuous seat and go cruising.

The sheer opulence and 1930s-style elegance of the cabin make every drive an occasion. It's one of the most beautiful interiors in the business, possibly because it's one of the few designed by a woman.

The folding metal roof means the Z4 is also as quiet as a coupe if you want to stay indoors.

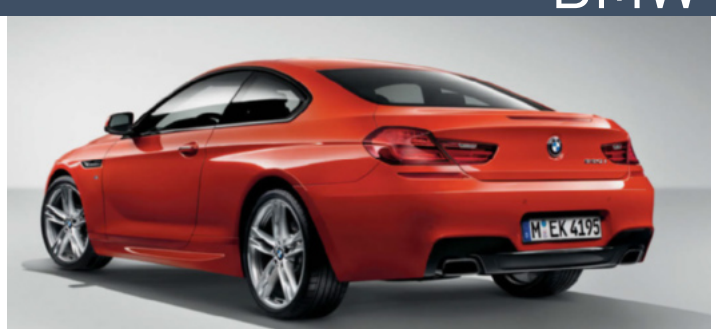
THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Spot-on styling
- ✔ Quick
- ✔ Comfortable
- ✔ A coupe and convertible in one
- ✔ Beautiful interior
- ✔ Fuel-efficiency gains

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Won't see which way a Boxster or Audi TTS went through corners
- ✘ Tight cockpit restricts elbow room
- ✘ So-so resale values
- ✘ Back end can struggle for traction

SPEX (sDrive35is)
- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre twin-turbo in-line six-cylinder/seven-speed automated manual/rear-wheel drive
- 250kW of power at 5900rpm/450Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.8 seconds
- 6.9L/100km highway; 12.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 210gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, leather, front and rear parking sensors, bi-xenon headlights, Bluetooth, heated seats, CD/DVD player with USB interface and hard disc audio storage, navigation, voice recognition, 18-inch alloys, run-flat tyres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...
Audi TTS; Mercedes SLK, Porsche Boxster

BMW **6 SERIES** FROM **$176,975**



BMW's top-of-the-line luxury coupe is priced from $177,445 for the 3.0-litre turbocharged petrol six 640i and $230,975 for the twin turbo 4.4-litre V8 650i, both with an eight-speed automatic and stop/start as standard.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★★	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★½☆	★★★½☆

The convertible, with the same drivetrains, costs $192,975 and $246,975 respectively.

The M6, with the same 412kW twin-turbo 4.4 V8 as the M5, costs $291,675 with a hard roof and $307,675 as a convertible.

The convertible's rakish profile is complemented by a power-operated soft-top, buttressed at the rear in old-world style.

It's a four-seater, though tall front seat occupants will use most of the available rear-seat legroom.

BMW's mighty twin-turbo V8 produces 330kW of power and 650Nm of torque, so when you squeeze the accelerator you're off to see the wizard, with the 100km/h mark coming up in just five seconds.

The eight-speed automatic is so smooth you don't even notice it.

Four driving modes, ranging from Comfort to Sport+, adjust the engine/transmission, steering and suspension settings.

The middle two settings, Normal and Sport, offer the best balance of ride comfort and handling precision.

The Six still isn't what you would call athletic, but it's engaging and capable.

The cabin is spacious and easy to navigate. BMW's iDrive system, complemented here by in-car email and internet via your smartphone, is now the most efficient of its type. The front seats are supremely comfortable and even with the roof down you still get useful boot space.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Stunning performance and refinement
- ✔ Open-top motoring in total luxury
- ✔ Tidy dynamics
- ✔ Superb quality
- ✔ iDrive works now

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Terrible resale values
- ✘ Sport+ setting shakes the body
- ✘ Roof up, the soft-top generates a bit of noise at speed
- ✘ Tightish rear-seat legroom and access

SPEX (650i Coupe)
- Made in Germany
- 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 petrol/eight-speed auto/rear-wheel drive
- 330kW of power at 5500rpm/650Nm of torque from 1750–4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.9L/100km highway; 12.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 206gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, adaptive bi-xenon headlights, rear camera, iDrive with TV, Bluetooth, navigation, adaptive drive, alarm, leather, heated and cooled Comfort front seats
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 41%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...
Audi RS5, Jaguar XKR, Mercedes E Class coupe

BMW **3 SERIES** FROM **$52,800**



BMW's F30 3 Series sedan range opens with the 316i, which runs a humble 1.6-litre turbopetrol four with just 100kW of power and 220Nm of torque. The 135kW/380Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic 320d is $62,800.

The 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine is also available in two states of tune with 135kW/270Nm in the 320i, at $60,500, and 180kW/350Nm in the 328i, which costs $69,400.

The 225kW/400Nm twin-turbopetrol 3.0-litre six, also with the eight-speed auto, is $93,430 in the 335i. Hooked up to an electric motor in the Active Hybrid 3, the price goes up to $100,200.

The pick of the range for value and performance is the 328i, though the 320i is pretty good too.

Both engines deliver remarkable midrange torque; the 328i adds serious top end zip, though with an abrasive, grating note.

The eight-speed automatic works with smoothness and efficiency most of the time, but when driving hard changes can be abrupt.

Eco Pro, Comfort and Sport modes, accessed via a switch on the centre console, vary engine, transmission and accelerator response.

Eco Pro dulls everything and keeps the engine operating at minimum revs. In traffic, it's fine and BMW claims it can deliver a 20 per cent reduction in fuel consumption.

Automatic stop/start helps, but BMW's system isn't the smoothest in the world and there's a noticeable jolt when the car restarts, which does get annoying.

The 2.0 turbodiesel is a refined, punchy engine, with more turbolag than some rivals but an effortless midrange surge when you squeeze the pedal and amazing fuel numbers, especially on the highway.

Given that the 3 Series was once a handling benchmark, the F30, like its predecessor, is disappointing. It just doesn't work on rough Australian roads.

On rough surfaces the body twitches, bounces and fidgets, never quite settling at speed with the authority and control of a Mercedes C Class.

The ride, on runflats, isn't nearly as comfortable or absorbent as the C Class either.

The Adaptive M suspension option, priced at $2200, improves dynamics and ride comfort considerably.

I tested a 328i with and without it, and they felt like completely different cars.

The M-equipped car stayed flat and balanced through corners, complementing the sharp steering instead of fighting it, and poor surfaces were dealt with properly, albeit still with some ride harshness.

Inside, the 3 is much more spacious than the Mercedes, especially in the back seat.

BMW now uses fake leather, called Sensatec, on its base models. So does Mercedes.

The boot has a long, narrow floor. It's extendable with a 40/20/40-split folding rear seat.

The F31 Touring wagon range includes the 328i ($73,400), the 320i ($64,500) and the 318d at $60,800.

The 3 Series GT, a marketing-driven styling exercise, costs $70.000 for the 320i, $72,300 for the 320d and $77,000 for the 328i.

The F30 3 Series has a suite of fine engines, but as far as handling, ride, all-round ability and value are concerned, the BMW is disappointing.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Frugal, responsive engines
- ✔ Light, tight, solid body
- ✔ Spacious, comfortable interior
- ✔ Sport Line looks superb

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Suspension doesn't control body movement properly
- ✘ Ride can be harsh on poor surfaces
- ✘ Runflat tyres
- ✘ Fake-leather upholstery
- ✘ Auto stop/start gives the car a jolt

SPEX (328i)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 180kW of power from 5000-6500rpm/350Nm of torque from 1250-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.9 seconds (claimed)
- 5.2l/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 147gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather, 17-inch alloy wheels with 225/50 tyres, Bluetooth (not with audio streaming), USB port, navigation, front and rear parking sensors, dual-zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Audi A4, Lexus IS, Mercedes C Class, Infiniti Q50, Volvo S60, Volvo V60

BMW **4 SERIES** FROM **$70,000**



BMW's 4 Series replaces the previous 3 Series coupe and convertible models.

The 420i coupe, with a 135kW/270Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, kicks off the range at $70,000. The 420d, with a 135kW/380Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel four, is $72,300. The mid-range 428i, at $81,000, delivers 180kW/350Nm from its 2.0-litre turbopetrol four. The range-topping 435i runs the familiar 225kW/400Nm 3.0-litre turbo straight six, priced at $108,530.

The 4 Series convertible range opens with the 420i at $87,000. The 420d is $89,300. The 428i is $98,000 and the 435i is $126,630.

The 4 Series Gran Coupe, with a four door body, opens with the 420i at $70,000. The 420d is $72,300. The 428i is $81,000 and the 435i is $109,000.

The 4 Series range, with an eight-speed automatic as standard, doesn't present anything new in the powertrain department. Indeed, the 4 is essentially a 3 Series in two-door coupe form.

But it's that form, which is lower, wider and longer than the 3 Series Coupe that preceded it, that brings newfound sportiness and on-road presence to the middle order of BMW's vast stable.

Its styling is a sweet balance of muscularity and elegance. It's also BMW's first mid-size coupe to have its widest point across the rear-wheel arches, creating a subtle yet effective taper. Design details, perhaps, but the net effect is suitably purposeful.

The 4 Series is quite large in dimensions, yet strikes a nice balance between the compactness of the two-door, four-seat format while offering generous room inside for comfortable, four-adult, long-haul journeys.

The low-slung seating, too, adds a requisite ambience of sportiness, while the cabin design favours neat, traditional BMW classicism. Luggage space is a reasonable 445 litres, accessible in the cabin via a 40/20/40 split-fold rear-seat arrangement.

On the road, it's apparent from the off that the 4 Series favours composed and sure-footed transit rather than wild and lively athleticism, even in the powerhouse 435i. It's lighter than its forebear (25-40kg depending on variant), it's lower (10mm) and sits on sport-focus-modified 3 Series suspension, yet even with the optional M Sport suspension/brake/wheel package — which also brings styling upgrades inside and out — the driving experience is more satisfying than it is scintillating.

The marriage of the 3.0-litre turbo-six and eight-speed auto is one of superb harmony, making the 435i clearly the most rewarding drive, with a powertrain most suited to the coupe's visual sporting promise, adaptive M suspension and the M Sport package as standard. The engine will nudge 7200rpm, well beyond peak 225kW's arrival at 5800rpm, while all 400Nm of torque arrive at just 1200rpm. BMW claims a rapid 5.1 seconds for the 0-100km/h sprint.

The 420d's 2.0-litre diesel, while torquey and hardly under-tasked when asked to get a move-on, just lacks the requisite soul deserving of the 4 Series' otherwise slick and classy persona. Call it 7.3 seconds to 100km/h. The big dividend, though, is its frugality — in official tests an astonishing combined average of 4.6L per 100km!

The 428i certainly delivers satisfaction, though it's not the most tuneful engine in the world. Its 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four is lively and responsive, with serious stick as well, reaching 100km/h in just 5.8 seconds. Efficiency-wise, BMW claims a commanding 6.4L/100km performance.

With Mercedes-Benz's C-Class coupe and Audi's A5 coupe, Sportback and cabrio firmly in the 4 Series' sights, buyers are now spoilt for choice. If you're shopping in this territory, all options should be driven before making a decision.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Classy exterior styling
- ✔ Proper four-adult roominess
- ✔ Fantastic 435i powertrain
- ✔ Grand touring manners
- ✔ Comfort and refinement levels

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ 420i diesel engine lacks soul
- ✘ Steering lacks clarity and directness
- ✘ Chassis could be more playful
- ✘ Interior design could be a little more 'bespoke' to separate it from 3 Series

SPEX (435i)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre straight-six turbopetrol/ eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 5800rpm/400Nm of torque from 1200-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 10.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 169gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, leather upholstery, 19-inch alloys, M Sport package, adaptive M suspension, front and rear parking sensors, camera, dual-zone air, navigation, Bluetooth with audio streaming, Sport or Luxury line trim
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...

Audi A5, Mercedes C Class

BMW **M3/M4** FROM **$156,900**



BMW's iconic M3, now in its fifth generation, is available as a four-door sedan only. Fear not, coupe fans — the two-door lives, now carrying an M4 badge in line with the revamped naming regime. Though mechanically identical, the sedan lands in Oz starting from $156,900; the coupe commands a $10,000 premium.

It takes about 2.5 minutes in either car — five minutes total, tops — to become convinced that BMW's performance skunkworks, M GmbH, has improved the already heroic 3 Series-based M car in virtually every department.

There's one big change in the M formula, found under the signature "power dome" bonnet. M GmbH has bucked the M3 tradition of ever-larger naturally aspirated engines to introduce a downsized and twin turbocharged 3.0-litre straight six. Offering 317kW between 5500-7300rpm and 550Nm from just 1850rpm, the six not only trounces the old 4.0-litre V8 for outputs, particularly in the low-to-mid rpm ranges, it's also claimed to offer 25 per cent better fuel economy and emissions.

Both sedan and coupe versions carry the same 4.1 seconds to 100km/h acceleration claim.

That said, it's bespoke, race-track-honed engineering, tricky construction and driving purity that make it a proper M car rather than merely glowing numbers. From the carbon-fibre roof to the specialised crankshaft, specifications are largely unique to M3/M4. The engine is 75 per cent unique to the M breed against BMW's regular 3.0-litre turbocharged unit. The seven-speed twin-clutch DCT (six-speed conventional manual is available special order) is unique, as are the aluminium-rich front and rear axle assemblies, new electric-assist steering, carbon-fibre one-piece tailshaft, active rear electromechanical differential... the list goes on. And on. Even the Michelin Pilot Super Sport tyres are a made-for M application.

Extensive use of carbon-fibre-reinforced plastic (CFRP) and aluminium construction in the body and chassis have reduced the weight by 60kg over the previous generation — little more than glass and the sedan's boot lid are shared with regular 3- and 4-Series models. The coupe weighs in at 1537kg, the sedan adds 23kg.

When you climb into either leather-upholstered cabin, the new generation feels fruitier and more richly appointed. Key features include sumptuous electric/heated front seats, (optional) head-up display, Harmon/Kardon sound with DAB+ radio, ConnectedDrive functionality and extended-function infotainment, plus a surround-view reversing camera. These M cars are no stripped-out racers — the sedan even has rear sun blinds.

With myriad adjustable drive modes (engine, transmission, dampers, steering etc) set to Comfort/Efficiency, both versions prove to be refined and comfortable long-distance tourers without losing a core sense of driver involvement. Ride quality is superbly disciplined despite those fat 19-inch wheel/tyres and the fact that, for M3/M4, engineers hard-mounted the rear axle sub-frame for an extra degree of handling precision.

The success or failure of an M car hinges on its red-misted, ten-tenths abilities once you engage Sport or Sport+ modes and aim the car at a racetrack. Instantly, you notice the improved, effortless shove of the turbo six — you ride the torque easier, the car demanding less gear-shifting for stunning pace. The amount of grip, in wet or dry, is truly immense.

The electric steering, which feels meaty and convincing in directness and communication, deserves special mention. As do the robust, tireless four-and-two-piston brakes, which can be upgraded, at a considerable premium, to six-and-four-piston carbon-ceramic units. But it's the clarity, balance and driver-friendliness of the chassis that's the proper highlight of a very impressive package.

Do the M3 and M4 feel any different? Outside of pedantic nuances, the answer is no. The only sensible reason to choose one over the other would be on practicality of door count and aesthetics.



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Ballistic engine
- ✔ Bespoke M-car engineering and construction
- ✔ Scintillating dynamic package
- ✔ Superb "comfort"-mode touring manners
- ✔ Luxurious interior

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Exhaust note lacks old car's hard edge
- ✘ DCT transmission a touch slow at low-speed take-up
- ✘ CoolM3 features (HUD) are cost optional
- ✘ We'd love an M3 Touring wagon please!

SPEX (M4)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre twin turbocharged six cylinder/seven speed DCT/rear wheel drive
- 317kW of power from 5500-7300rpm/550Nm of torque from 1850-5500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds
- 6.9L/100km highway; 12.0L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 204gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometers
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, alarm, leather upholstery, Connected Drive, surround cameras, 19-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, carbon fibre trim, adaptive bi-xenon headlights, metallic paint, navigation, DAB+ radio
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Mercedes C63AMG, Porsche Cayman S

BMW **6 SERIES GRAN COUPE** FROM **$184,455**



BMW'S Gran Coupe range opens with the 235kW, 3.0-litre straight six turbopetrol 640i at $183,975. The 640d, with a 230kW 3.0-litre twin-turbodiesel six, is $184,800.

The 330kW 4.4-litre twin-turbopetrol V8 650i is $237,975.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★½☆

An eight-speed automatic is standard.

The 412kW, 4.4-litre twin turbo V8 M6 Gran Coupe is $298,675. BMW created the Gran Coupe by stretching the 6 Series two door coupe's wheelbase, so it has a properly loungeable, long distance back seat, and is a big unit, at five and a bit metres nose to tail.

The 640i's 3.0-litre turbopetrol has a torque curve as flat as the Nullarbor: the full 450Nm is all yours from 1300rpm to 4500rpm.

It's only when you hop into the 640d that the petrol engine feels underdone.

This is the world's best turbodiesel six. With 630Nm of torque, it seems to pull with half the effort of the turbopetrol, yet with 230kW it's hardly short on power, either, and will happily spin to a most undiesel-like 5800rpm. Both sixes hit 100km/h in 5.4 seconds; the V8 takes 4.6 seconds.

And the M? 4.2 seconds. That's 911 territory.

The Gran Coupe shines in fast, open corners. Its dynamics seem to get tighter, more controlled and precise as speeds rise.

The interior is BMW's most spectacular effort to date.

Up front you've got a twin cockpit, encircled in curves, to resemble a large, ridiculously expensive nautical appliance.

It's stunningly well-finished, indecently comfortable and, of course, loaded.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Gorgeous body
- ✔ An even more gorgeous interior
- ✔ Wonderful engines
- ✔ Plenty of space for four
- ✔ All the fruit

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ The 640i costs nearly $70,000 more than a 535i, with the same drivetrain
- ✘ Adjustable suspension, anti-roll and rear-wheel steering should be standard
- ✘ Ride can get prettylumpy on our roads
- ✘ No spare tyre

SPEX (640i)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre straight six turbopetrol/ eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 235kW of power at 5800rpm; 450Nm of torque from 1300-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.4 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 10.7L/100km city; 95 octane; CO2 emissions are 183gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 19-inch alloy wheels, camera, head-up display, heated sports front seats, four-zone air, navigation, Bluetooth, active head restraints, runflat tyres, adaptive LED headlights with automatic high/low beam.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...

Audi A7, Mercedes CLS, Porsche Panamera

BMW **M5** FROM **$229,930**



BMW's E60 5.0-litre V10 M5 was arguably the most extreme mainstream performance sedan we'll ever see. That's why some people loved it, while others hated it.

This F10 M5 is no less capable but much more sensible.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆	★★★★½
Performance	Value for money
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

There's no distinction whatsoever between earth-shaking torque and atomic power in the BMW's twin turbo V8 engine. You get shedloads of both whenever you want it, from idle on up.

Two M buttons on the wheel let you dial one set of "make it go" data into suburbia mode and the other to your secret I'm-going-for-a-drive-by-myself setting. All the adjustable stuff is there — engine mapping, transmission, dampers, variable ratio steering (still old-world hydraulic) and the very clever Active M rear diff lock — and it works as a coherent piece of technology, albeit one that makes the car feel rather clinical and over-teched.

The all-steel F10 weighs in at two tonnes and feels noticeably heavier on the road than its predecessor. It's a beautifully balanced handful in any corner, with more than expected body roll but also massive front-end grip, powerful, fade-free brakes and that signature M-car ability to be steered with the throttle.

As with the Mercedes-Benz AMG E63, the M5's vast reserve of instantly accessible torque means that go-forward rather than go-sideways does require a sensitive right boot. In the wet, you'll light up the traction control if you blink.

You could argue, without contradiction, that the M5 has too much performance for normal road use, buy a hardly underdone 550i and save yourself a lazy $80,000 or so, but that's not really the point, is it?

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Superb performance
- ✔ Fabulous driver's seat
- ✔ First-class quality
- ✔ Extreme dynamic ability

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Try putting it in Park. I couldn't work out how
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Be very careful if you start adjusting the traction control

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8/eight-speed double-clutch automated manual/ rear-wheel drive
- 423kW of power at 6000-7000rpm/680Nm of torque from 1500-5750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.2 seconds (claimed)
- 7.6L/100km highway; 14.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 232gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, navigation, head-up display, surround-view cameras, adaptive bi-xenon headlights, Bluetooth, USB and internet connectivity (via your device), M front seats, sunroof, 20-inch alloys with 265/35 front and 295/30 rear tyres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 28%

compare with...

Mercedes AMG E63, Jaguar XFR

BMW **5 SERIES** FROM **$80,400**



BMW's F10 5 Series sedan is available with five engines. The base 135kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel 520d is $82,900 while the 135kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol 520i is $80,400.

The same engine with 180kW of power in the 528i is $97,900. Six-cylinder petrol power, once the Five Series defining engine style, is now confined to the 225kW 3.0-litre turbo 535i at $116,930. The 535d, with a 230kW/600Nm 3.0-litre twin turbodiesel, is $122,400. The 550i, with a 330kW 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8, is $159,930.

The Active Hybrid 5, which uses the 3.0-litre turbopetrol six, is $120,400.

All are fitted with an eight-speed automatic. Touring wagons include the 520d at $91,400 and the 535i at $122,930.

The force-fed 3.0-litre six in the 535i is still one of the best six-cylinder engines in the world. Its 400Nm of torque is available from 1200–5000rpm, so you get relentless idle to redline performance, plus exceptional refinement and outstanding fuel economy.

The F10 allows you to dial up multiple drivetrain, suspension and steering settings with the fastest, most powerful data network on four wheels, called FlexRay.

Both engines are devastatingly responsive when you push the Sport or Sport+ buttons, which also makes the pedal more sensitive and gets the eight-speed shifting faster and more often, but still smoothly.

The F10 Five is a bigger car than the E60, so from the driver's seat it and the Mercedes E Class, once clearly the larger of the two, now feel the same size.

Fixed-rate dampers and electric steering are standard; four-way adjustable dampers plus anti-roll hardware add $7000.

BMW's 5 Series has for 20 years been the feature sedan in the "Handling: How to Do It" chapter of the automotive engineering textbook.

The F10 still takes corners with complete authority, unerring precision and immaculate balance.

However, the front end of the 335i doesn't absorb bumps like it should and too much harshness is transmitted to the cabin.

The higher profile tyres on the four cylinder models would offer better compliance, but the Five's major weakness is its unforgiving ride on rough surfaces.

The Five's cabin is pure 21st-century sleek, upmarket gloss, like the interior of a private jet.

BMW's iDrive now works intuitively, while the wide, high-resolution screen requires only a glance to know where you are and where you need to go with the cursor. The Five also includes a head up display.

Rear seat legroom is adequate for most people and the boot is large. Runflats are standard, so there is no spare.

It's a tough call in this class now. The Lexus GS350 F Sport is the value buy and a pretty respectable drive, too, while the 5 Series remains the sports-flavoured choice.

However if you regularly do long distances the updated Mercedes E Class is easily the pick of these three simply because it offers the best ride/handling compromise for Australian roads.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Good value
- ✔ Refined, sophisticated, fuel-efficient engines right across the range
- ✔ Taut, secure handling
- ✔ Superb quality
- ✔ Much improved ride comfort

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Brakes lack feel and progression
- ✘ Ride comfort isn't what it should be on the 535i, with too much harshness coming through the front end
- ✘ No spare

SPEX (535i)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre twin-scroll turbo straight six/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 5800rpm/400Nm of torque from 1200–5000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 6.1 seconds (claimed)
- 6.4L/100km highway; 11.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 195gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, leather, head-up display, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, swivelling bi-xenon headlights, 18-inch alloys, metallic paint, navigation, keyless start and USB
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...

Audi A6, Lexus GS, Mercedes-Benz E Class

BMW **X1** FROM **$46,300**



The X1 range opens with the 105kW, 2.0-litre turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic sDrive (which in BMW parlance denotes rear-wheel drive) 18d, priced at $46,300.

The 135kW, 2.0-litre twin turbodiesel xDrive20d is $56,900.

Oh, xDrive is BMW-speak for all-wheel drive.

The base petrol X1 is the 135kW, 2.0-litre turbopetrol sDrive20i, at $48,300.

The 180kW, 2.0-litre turbopetrol xDrive28i is $59,900.

All X1s have automatic stop/start which cuts the engine when you come to a stop and select neutral, then restarts it when you select first gear.

The turbodiesels are outstanding engines, with the added bonus of class-leading economy and emissions numbers.

The single turbo 18d engine pulls just as easily off the bottom (both need a gentle jab to get mobile) and segue effortlessly into the midrange.

The second turbo comes on boost to give the 20d a noticeable extra kick through to 5000rpm, but I'd keep the $10,000 and go for the 18d.

Both turbopetrol engines deliver an outstanding combination of refinement, flexibility, performance and economy. The 135kW version is the 20i, which has more than enough performance for a small wagon like the X1; the 180kW engine in the 28i adds serious top- end power and with eight ratios in the automatic it's a rocket, hitting 100km/h in just 6.1 seconds.

The X1 steers and handles more like a compact sports sedan than a typical SUV.

There's little to be gained by choosing an all-wheel drive over a rear wheel drive model.

The body is exceptionally rigid. It has that characteristic BMW poise and balance, albeit with a touch of understeer in the all-wheel-drive versions, and the conventional hydraulic steering is outstanding in precision, feedback and consistency.

The X1 is an involving, communicative machine and a real pleasure to drive.

The dash features a sleek, elegant design with minimal buttons and switches. Everything is clearly marked and easy to operate. Yes, even iDrive.

BMW has now got the message that too many of its cars lack adequate storage for your bits and pieces, so the X1 has plenty.

Rear-seat space is tighter than the 3 Series Touring because in that car the seat cushion itself is longer. Four average-sized adults, however, can travel comfortably.

Overall boot volume isn't huge and the floor is short but, given the overall size of the X1, capacity is reasonable.

Useful stuff includes a mesh net that can be positioned in extended or normal load area configurations, rubber load straps, a segmented tray underneath, netted side bin and a 12-volt outlet.

The rear seat-back folds down in any 40/20/40 combination for an almost flat floor of 1.7 metres.

There's no spare, so venture off the beaten track at your peril.

In this class, the X1 is superior to Audi's Q3, but you should also drive the Mercedes GLA and the Range Rover Evoque before you make your decision..

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Excellent value for money
- ✔ All four engines are powerful, refined and deliver great fuel economy
- ✔ The best-handling SUV on the road
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No spare
- ✘ Back seat space can be tight
- ✘ Runflats

SPEX (xDrive20d automatic)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre, turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 4000rpm/380Nm of torque from 1750–2750rpm
- 0–100km/h in 8.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 6.4L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 143gkm.
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, cruise control, rear parking sensors, CD player with USB and auxiliary inputs, Bluetooth, leather-wrapped steering wheel, cloth upholstery and roof rails
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Audi Q3, Mazda CX5, Mercedes GLA, Range Rover Evoque

BMW **X3/X4** FROM **$60,765**



BMW's X3, introduced in early 2011, is now much closer in size to the X5 and unless you need seven seats, it's a great value alternative.

The X3 lineup opens with the xDrive 20i, priced at a very attractive $60,765. It runs BMW's 2.0-litre direct-injection turbopetrol four-cylinder with a standard eight-speed automatic. The engine produces 135kW of power, 270Nm of torque and averages 7.5L/100km.

The xDrive20d is priced at $64,400. As is often the case with BMW, it's this model that looks like the pick of the range.

It runs a 2.0-litre turbodiesel with 140kW and 400Nm. Average fuel consumption is just 5.4L/100km and it will reach 100km/h in a claimed 8.1 seconds.

The xDrive30d, at $77,400, runs the 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbodiesel with 190kW and 560Nm. It's the quickest variant, taking just 6.2 seconds to 100km/h, while fuel consumption averages 6.0L/100km.

The $72,930 xDrive28i uses the high performance 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, with 180kW and 350Nm. It hits 100km/h in 6.7 seconds and also averages 7.5L/100km, so there's no fuel consumption penalty for your extra 45kW. Loaves and fishes, indeed.

The X4 features the same drivetrains as the X3 in a high riding coupe style body, as first seen on the X6. So you lose a bit of cargo volume and rear seat headroom and prices are considerably higher, though you do get more standard equipment in the X4.

X4 prices start at $69,430 for the xDrive20i. The xDrive 20d is $73,400, the xDrive 30d is $83,900 and the xDrive35i, with the 225kW 3.0-litre six cylinder turbopetrol drivetrain offered only on X4, is $87,430.

BMW's Efficient Dynamics technologies contribute to the excellent fuel efficiency across all models. Automatic stop/start is standard, while brake energy regeneration and electric power steering also help save fuel.

The base suspension delivers agile handling and excellent body control. BMW also offers optional adjustable dampers, variable power distribution to individual wheels and variable ratio steering as options, all of which are of questionable value.

BMW claims the largest load area in the class, but with theback seats up or folded flat, there's nothing in it between the X3 and Audi's Q5.

While the 28i and 30d certainly give you more bang for your bucks, the base 20i turbopetrol and 20d turbodiesel deliver all the performance you can use on a daily basis, in large part because the eight speed automatic is such an efficient transmission.

The 20i has remarkable low down pulling power for a petrol engine, with its maximum torque produced at a diesel-like 1250rpm. It's smooth, economical and responsive. However the automatic stop/start system on the test car was very abrupt and intrusive. Each time the car restarted, it did so with an almighty jolt. It's the most agricultural auto stop/start system I've experienced in any car. You can turn it off, but that's hardly the point.

The X3 has always been a great handler and this model is, too. Runflat tyres, though, make the X3's ride harsh around town, where Audi's Q5 is much more comfortable.

Interior fit and finish quality is comparable with the X5, but the leather is fake, not real.

Rear seat space is OK for most people and the flat cushion and backrest offer good support for child restraints.

The boot is a large, versatile space with a power tailgate and low floor that's easy to load and extendable in a 40/20/40 configuration.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Base 2.0-litre models are excellent value
- ✔ Spacious, versatile interior
- ✔ Great handling for an SUV
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Automatic stop start needs a lot of work
- ✘ Runflat tyres murder ride comfort
- ✘ Adults sit a bit knees-up in the back

SPEX (20i)

- Made in the USA
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 135kW of power from 5000-6250rpm/270Nm of torque from 1250-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 175gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, fake leather upholstery, Bluetooth, USB port, iPod connectivity, navigation, rear-view camera, 18-inch alloys, dual zone air, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Audi Q5, Range Rover Evoque, Porsche Macan, Volvo XC60

BMW X5 FROM $83,900



The third generation of the world's top-selling luxury wagon, BMW's F15 X5 offers a four cylinder turbodiesel, more equipment, stronger performance and improved fuel efficiency. It also maintains the X5's reputation as the gun drive in big SUVs.

The range opens with the rear-wheel drive X5 sDrive25d 160kW four-cylinder turbodiesel, which costs $83,900; the all-wheel-drive xDrive25d is priced at $88,900.

The 190kW 3.0-litre xDrive30d turbodiesel costs $100,400, the 225kW 35i turbopetrol is $106,930, the 230kW twin turbodiesel 40d Sport is $116,400 and the 330kW 4.4-litre twin turbopetrol V8 50i is $133,930.

The top-of-the-range (for now) xDrive M50d, with a 280kW 3.0-litre triple turbodiesel, is priced at $148,400. Expect to see more M Performance and M variants later in 2015.

Given its considerable price advantage over the 3.0-litre petrol and turbodiesel sixes, and what will certainly be outstanding fuel efficiency, you would want to test drive the 25d four-cylinder before committing to a six. The rear-wheel-drive variant in particular should be most attractive as a drive and a deal.

In day-to-day driving, the single-turbo 3.0d works beautifully, is all the engine you need and with a claimed time of 6.9 seconds from 0-100km/h, it's hardly a slug either. That said, the sheer strength and relentless pulling power of the twin turbo 40d engine is immediately noticeable. It hits 100km/h in 5.9 seconds, which is more than half a second quicker than the 3.0-litre turbopetrol 35i.

As for the triple-turbodiesel M50d, well, words don't really do it justice. It feels, sounds and goes like a V8 musclecar engine, however it uses about half as much fuel. The 0-100km/h trip takes 5.3 seconds.

BMW's signature 3.0-litre turbopetrol six in the 35i is a smooth, flexible engine however when you experience the performance and efficiency of the X5's turbodiesel offerings, both it and the 4.4-litre twin-turbopetrol V8 in the 50i don't quite add up. That said, BMW's 4.4-litre V8 is wonderfully smooth and responsive right across the rev range. It needs more of a note, though, because it sounds tame compared with the M50d. The 50i reaches 100km/h in 5.0 seconds.

The X5 is remarkably agile and well controlled for two-tonnes' worth of wagon.

Whether you stick with the standard, non-adjustable suspension, or choose the optional adaptive Comfort, Dynamic, Professional or M suspension upgrades, the X5 is very enjoyable to drive, and rivalled only by the Porsche Cayenne for dynamic ability. However the new electric power steering's lack of feel and feedback are disappointing. It's far too heavy in Dynamic mode.

The cabin is sleekly minimalist in style and comfortable, with a beautiful sense of space and light. BMW's iDrive system is now unbeatable for ease of use, clarity and the depth of its functionality. It features a huge tablet-style screen and internet connectivity via your smartphone.

There's plenty of leg room in the 40/20/40 rear bench, which is shaped for two and luxuriously comfortable.

The optional two rear seats fold out of the floor. The seats are too small and leg room is too tight for anyone bar small children.

There's ample floor space, extendable to nearly 1.9 metres. A pair of tracks with four sliding lugs, a load cover with roll-out protective mesh barrier and 12-volt outlet are fitted, while the top half of the horizontally split tailgate is power operated.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Outstanding turbodiesel performance and economy
- ✔ Outstanding dynamics
- ✔ Works well as a five-seater, with heaps of load space
- ✔ Beautiful interior and plenty of space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Optional back seats are expensive and useless for people with legs
- ✘ Remote control steering
- ✘ You wouldn't leave town without a real spare
- ✘ Round-town and rough road ride can be sharp on runflats
- ✘ Curtain airbags don't extend to the last row of seats

SPEX (30D)

- Made in the USA
- 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbodiesel/ eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 190kW of power at 4000rpm/560Nm of torque from 1500-3000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.9 seconds (claimed)
- 5.7L/100km highway; 7.0L/100 km in the city. CO^2 emissions are 162gkm
- Max towing weight 3500kg (25d: 2700kg)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- X5 30d and 35i models include six airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, a space saver spare, head-up display, lane departure and collision warning, 360 degree cameras, Data Dot security, roof rails, leather, front and rear parking sensors, navigation, Bluetooth and bi-xenon headlights
- Redbook future values (30d): 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Mercedes M/GL Class, Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Sport

BMW **X6** FROM **$110,575**



BMW claims its X6 created yet another niche: the Sports Activity Coupe.

The X6 xDrive35i, which signifies the twin-scroll turbo 3.5-litre straight-six petrol model, costs $120,675. The xDrive30d with the 3.0-litre turbodiesel is $110,575; the xDrive40d with 3.0-litre twin turbodiesel is $127,075.

The twin-turbo 4.4-litre petrol V8 xDrive50i, with 300kW of power, is priced at $150,075. An eight-speed auto is standard.

The triple turbodiesel xDriveM50d, with 280kW and 740Nm is $156,675.

BMW's xDrive system, which can shift torque between the front and rear wheels, is complemented on the X6 by Dynamic Performance Control (DPC), so drive can also be varied between the rear wheels themselves.

Its primary function is to send more torque to the outside rear wheel when accelerating hard out of a corner, thus countering understeer. It's very effective, allowing the X6 to belie its bulk.

The 35i is beautifully refined, as potent and tractable as many V8s.

If you're after effortless, relaxed torque on your daily drive, with the ability to deliver serious stick when you push the pedal harder, the 40d is recommended.

BMW's sports driver's seat is standard in the X6. It's firm but very comfortable and supportive, with an extendable cushion that long-legged drivers will appreciate.

Rear-seat headroom is obviously tighter than the X5 but still fine for occupants up to 185cm or so.

An updated X6, with engine tweaks, an air suspension option and infotainment system upgrades, was arriving as we went to press.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆ (35i)	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Turbodiesel performance and economy
- ✔ Loaded with gear
- ✔ DPC makes the X6 feel like a big rear-drive sports sedan
- ✔ Great seats
- ✔ Excellent fit and finish quality

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Big bum look is an acquired taste
- ✘ Dirty looks from SUV haters
- ✘ Should have a real spare
- ✘ Small load capacity for such a big car

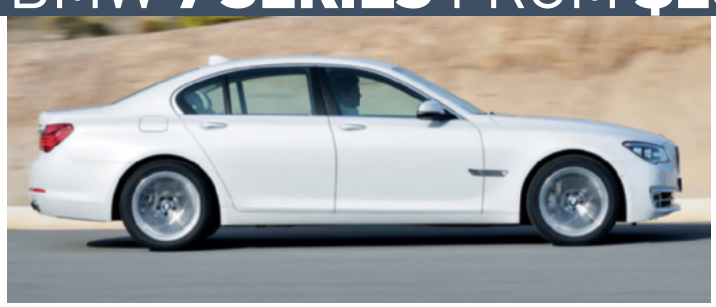
SPEX (X6 40d)

- Made in the USA
- 3.0-litre twin-turbodiesel straight-six/six-speed sequential automatic/all-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 4400rpm/ 600Nm of torque from 1500-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 6.8L/100km highway; 8.8L/100km city. CO2 emissions are 198gkm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, swivelling bi-xenon headlights, Data Dot security, 19-inch alloys, automatic high/low beam, tyre pressure monitoring, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, six-stack CD changer, USB/audio plug-in, automatic dual-zone air, navigation with TV and voice activation, Bluetooth, leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Porsche Cayenne, Mercedes M Class, Range Rover Sport

BMW **7 SERIES** FROM **$206,200**



BMW's 2015 big bomber range opens with the 730d, with a 190kW 3.0-litre twin-turbodiesel six, priced at $206,200. The 740i, at $212,275, runs the 3.0-litre twin-turbo petrol six, here with 235W and 450Nm. The long wheelbase 740Li is $227,275.

A twin-turbo 4.4-litre V8 drives the 750i, with 330kW and 650Nm. It costs $282,930. The 750Li is $299,630.

The 400kW/750Nm 6.0-litre V12 760Li is the most expensive BMW in Australia at $286,531.

BMW also offers the Active Hybrid 7. Priced at $223,100, or $238,100 for the long wheelbase version, it uses the 235kW 3.0-litre twin turbopetrol six with a 40kW electric motor for assistance, so total system output is 260kW.

Average fuel consumption is claimed to be 6.8L/100km, but around town (the only place a hybrid makes sense)this drops to just 6.0L/100km. The 0-100km/h trip takes 5.7 seconds.

The 750 takes 4.8 seconds to reach 100km/h, which is almost a second quicker than the 740.

However, the 3.0-litre straight six at least sounds like it's enjoying the trip.

There's nothing to criticise about the way it gets there and, given the circa $70,000 price difference, you'd pick the straight six every time.

Suspension is adjustable across four settings, from boulevarde blancmange to puckered up tight. Porsche's Panamera is now the best handler in this class.

Given the absolutely horrendous resale values for the Seven, a used one would be a bargain. As long as it's not an ex-hire limo, which most are.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★★★★½
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★☆☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Looks less weird than the previous one
- ✔ Superb dynamics
- ✔ 3.0-litre twin-turbo petrol six is a honey
- ✔ More spacious and comfortable than your loungeroom
- ✔ The V8 flies

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✔ The V8 is characterless
- ✔ 750i's price is getting a bit silly
- ✔ Awful resale values

SPEX (750i)

- Made in Germany
- 4.4-litre, twin-turbo V8/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 330kW of power at 5500rpm/650Nm of torque from 2000-4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.8 seconds
- 6.6L/100km highway; 11.9L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 199gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, leather, four-zone air, Data Dot security, rear camera, front and rear parking sensors, sunroof, swivelling bi-xenon headlights with washers and automatic high-beam dipping, alarm, six-stack CD/DVD player, iDrive with navigation, TV and iPod USB connection, night vision, rear-seat entertainment system and rear-window sunblinds
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 40%; 5yr: 23%

compare with...

Audi A8, Jaguar XJ, Mercedes S Class, Porsche Panamera

BMW **I8** FROM **$299,000**



BMW's i8, priced at $299,000, stakes a claim to be the poster child for plug-in hybrids. It plunges into the deep end of alternative technology with a bold design that says "the future of driving" like nothing else on the road.

The shape reflects the unorthodoxy underneath. The i8 has a carbon-fibre passenger cell at its core, mounted on an aluminium chassis. The whole lot is clad in plastic body panels.

Under the sealed bonnet is a 98kW electric motor powered by a 7.1kW/h lithium-ion battery pack running down the car's spine. The motor drives the front wheels via a two-speed automatic and after a recharge using the domestic mains or dedicated charger, the i8 can travel up to 35 kilometres on battery power alone.

At the rear is a tiny 1.5-litre turbocharged three-cylinder engine with 170kW that drives the rear wheels via a six-speed automatic. Drivers can select a variety of hybrid modes to maximise efficiency or performance from the engine and motor working together.

The result is fuel economy of 2.1 L/100km on the European standard test. With a 42-litre fuel tank and full battery, i8 can travel up to 600 kilometres.

In the real world, you'll be doing very well to get even close to these consumption and distance claims.

When it comes to performance, though, there's no doubt i8 can honour the cheques being written by its looks. It competes against a top-shelf Porsche 911, Audi R8 or Aston Martin V8. The i8's acceleration is comparable, or better, at 4.4 seconds to 100km/h, and it boasts blistering overtaking acceleration that dispatches 80-120km/h in a mere 2.6 seconds.

A remarkable lack of drama goes with this pace. Plant your foot and there's little evidence you're racing towards a jail term other than numbers in the head-up display. Response from the engine is excellent, although there can be a delay in power delivery when getting back on the throttle after a corner.

Sound is a vital sports car ingredient and the engine snarls purposefully when pressing on, occasionally joined by high-pitched electric noises. It does lack the spine-tingling thrill of a high-revving V8, though, and sounds more than a little synthetic.

The same goes for the way it handles. Its well-sorted chassis steers with precision, lapping up corners in a tidy fashion. It's benign, almost foolproof.

But it does miss the visceral nuance and involvement of a traditional sports car. The i8 experience is all a bit remote, like a very expensive simulator. The brake pedal in particular has an almost total absence of feedback. BMW's trademark dynamic qualities are numbed by layers of electronics.

This is underscored by a high level of cabin quietness and comfort for a sports car. Getting in and out isn't easy thanks to low seats and wide sills. But the doors, which swing skywards, are nicely counterweighted so they move effortlessly.

The clean, modern interior is on the money, with virtual instruments and premium materials. There's plenty of equipment, too, with few option boxes to tick.

Excellent front seats have plenty of room, although the rears are useless for adults and for a long weekend, you'll need to supplement the tiny 154-litre "boot" by using the rears for luggage.

Despite these constraints, with its impressive mix of pace and efficiency, the i8 would make a lovely touring car. And it will turn heads everywhere it goes.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
Not yet listed
Performance
★★★★½
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Futuristic design
- ✔ Premium interior
- ✔ Loaded with gear
- ✔ Precise handling
- ✔ Quiet and refined for a sports car

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Unrealistic fuel-economy figure
- ✘ Tiny boot
- ✘ (Almost) useless rear seats
- ✘ Unengaging to drive
- ✘ Wide A-pillars hamper vision

SPEX
- Made in Germany
- 1.5-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/electric motor/lithium-ion battery pack/two and six-speed automatics/front, rear or all-wheel drive
- 266kW of power/570Nm of torque (combined; rpm not specified)
- 0-100km/h in 4.4 seconds (claimed)
- 2.1L/100km combined; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 49gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Six airbags, stability control, 20-inch alloys, head-up display, lane departure and collision warning, rear camera, leather, front and rear parking sensors, navigation, Bluetooth, independent BMW Connected Drive, audible pedestrain warning, LED headlights
- Redbook future values: Not yet established

compare with...
Audi R8, Lamborghini Huracán, Porsche 911

CITROËN **C4** FROM **$22,990**



Citroën's 2015 C4 starts at $22,990 for the Seduction, but you don't get much in the way of performance. It runs an 88kW 1.6-litre petrol engine/five-speed manual. Matched with a four-speed automatic, it's $24,990. This model takes a glacial 13.9 seconds to reach 100km/h.

The 82kW 1.6-litre turbodiesel/six-speed automated manual Seduction is $27,990.

The C4 Aircross SUV, which is basically a rebadged, reskinned Mitsubishi ASX, costs $31,990 or $33,990 with all-wheel drive.

The seven-seat Grand C4 Picasso is one of the best people movers on the market. Priced at $43,990, it features a 110kW/370Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel drivetrain, which is deal for the people-mover application.

The 88kW 1.6 petrol/five-speed manual drivetrain in the base C4 hatch is an honest combination, especially around town where it offers reasonable torque for a small petrol engine.

The 1.6-turbodiesel/six-speed manual has got nothing below 2000rpm or so; from here, it pulls smoothly and strongly and would be the obvious choice if you do a lot of highway driving.

The C4 handles and steers competently enough. Ride comfort is excellent, as you would expect from Citroën. The driver's seat is luxurious, too.

Reliability is still a very live issue with French cars, but if you're after a luxuriously comfortable hatchback, or a brilliantly designed people mover, and you're prepared to risk it, the C4 is worth investigating.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Luxurious and comfortable
- ✔ Refined, frugal engines
- ✔ Supportive driver's seat
- ✔ Big boot
- ✔ Full-size spare

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ It ain't quick
- ✘ Six-speed automated manual can be clumsy and harsh in its shifts
- ✘ Limited front and rear seat legroom
- ✘ Reliability issues and weak resale values

SPEX (1.6 petrol manual Seduction)
- Made in France
- 1.6L petrol/five-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 88kW of power at 6000rpm/160Nm of torque at 4250rpm
- 0–100km/h in 12.5 seconds
- 4.7L/.100km highway; 8.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 143gkm
- Warranty: Six years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloys, cruise control, tinted glass, leather-wrapped steering wheel, Bluetooth, CD player with auxiliary jack.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 27%

compare with...
Ford Focus, Peugeot 308, VW Golf

CITROËN **C5** FROM **$36,190**



Citroën's 2014 C5 range opens with the 120kW/340Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto Exclusive sedan at $45,190.

The C5 wagon, called the Tourer, is $47,190.

The turbodiesel delivers the smooth, responsive, economical performance that complements this ageing but still engaging car. It's as slow as a wet week, but if you like to get around briskly then the C5 is probably not your sort of car.

Citroën's Hydractive suspension uses hydropneumatic operation which can vary both the ride quality and ride height.

In this regard, the C5 is similarly comfortable and composed to an E-Class Mercedes. It's a beautiful car to drive long distances.

Those in the back seat endure fairly tight legroom, a common problem in French cars.

The sedan's boot has plenty of space plus a 60/40 split-fold rear-seat extension.

The Tourer's load area is also large and the extended floor is nearly 1.7m long.

The C5 is in its dotage, the pirces being asked for are pretty ambitious and resale values are horrific. It's still got appeal if you're after a luxuriously comfortable diesel in the French style, but you would also want to test Peugeot's much newer 508 before committing. Other better value turbodiesel alternatives, also available as a sedan or wagon, includes VW's Passat and the Mazda 6.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★☆☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Luxuriously comfortable and quiet
- ✔ Smooth, supple ride
- ✔ Refined, relaxed, frugal performance
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ French cars can be troublesome
- ✘ Old and overpriced
- ✘ Resale values on this one aren't pretty, either
- ✘ Tightish back-seat space
- ✘ Heavy for its size

SPEX
- Made in France
- 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 120kW of power at 3750rpm/340Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 10.0 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; CO^2 emissions 179gkm
- Warranty: Six years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, dual-zone automatic air, rear parking sensors, power-adjustable and heated front seats, a power-operated tailgate in the Tourer and 18-inch alloy wheels with 245/45 tyres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 37%; 5yr: 22%

compare with...
Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Peugeot 508, VW Passat

CITROËN **DS3** FROM **$27,740**



Premium luxury/sports small cars are one of the growth classes in the market, and Citroën's DS3 is one of the better examples.

The base model D-Style, priced at $27,740, runs a 88kW 1.6-litre petrol engine with a four-speed automatic gearbox.

The D-Sport, with a 115kW 1.6-litre turbo/six-speed manual drivetrain, is a much more entertaining proposition and at $29,740 it also includes 17-inch alloys, an alarm and automatic air.

This class is design-driven and, as you can see, the DS3 is certainly a great-looking little car, inside and out.

While the suspension is firmer than usual from Citroën to give the DS3 the requisite sports-flavoured handling, the ride is compliant and comfortable.

The D-Sport is a very enjoyable car to drive and a lot less punishing to live with than a Mini. It's also much more practical.

However Renault's Clio RS200, the Ford Fiesta ST and the VW Polo GTi are the standout drives in this class at present, with the Ford unbeatable value at $25,990.

Back-seat space is tight, but the DS3 actually has more room than some of its rivals. Boot space is also generous by class standards.

Both versions are also available as a gorgeous convertible. The D-Style costs $30,990; the D-Sport is $32,990.

Citroën recently announced a six-years/unlimited kilometres warranty on its cars. Maybe the French are beginning to get a handle on reliability. Maybe...

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★½☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Edgy, go-fast styling
- ✔ Punchy 1.6-litre turbo in D-Sport
- ✔ Smooth, precise manual gearbox
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Citroen's reliability can be patchy
- ✘ No auto option for D-Sport
- ✘ Excessive tyre and wind noise
- ✘ Weak resale values

SPEX (D-SPORT)
- Made in France
- 1.6L turbo four-cylinder/ six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 6000rpm/240Nm of torque from 1400–4000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.3 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are156gkm
- Warranty: Six years/unlimited km
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, automatic air, 17-inch alloys, alarm, cloth upholstery, USB connectivity, leather-wrapped steering wheel, cruise control with speed limiter
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...
Alfa Mito, Ford Fiesta ST, Peugeot 208, Renault Clio RS200, VW Polo GTi

FIAT **500** FROM **$16,000**



The Fiat 500 range opens with the 1.2-litre Pop, priced at $16,000 with a five-speed manual or $17,500 with the five-speed Dualogic transmission.

The 1.4-litre/six-speed manual S is $19,000 and the Dualogic is $20,500.

The 875cc Twin Air engine, with a five-speed manual, is available with Dualogic only, in the $22,000 Lounge.

The completely crazy Abarth 695 Biposto, with a 140kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol, racecar-style H-pattern six-speed manual gearbox, Akrapovic pipe, adjustable suspension, rear titanium roll bar, Brembo brakes and 18-inch wheels is $65,000.

Like the reincarnated Mini, the 500 is a retro car inspired by the model of the same name that Fiat built from 1957-1975 as affordable transport in Italy.

The 875cc Twin Air is a unique fuel-efficient powerplant from Fiat. As the name implies, it's a two cylinder and its fuel numbers are comparable with a small hybrid like Toyota's Prius C.

It's a great little engine. Power is a non-event, but it's got loads of torque across the midrange so you don't have to thrash it and it will hold its own easily at 110km/h.

The 500 is a solid little tacker but it has no sports pretensions whatsoever.

Although the Fiat is tiny, it does feel very spacious from the driver's seat because you sit high, with plenty of headroom and excellent vision right around the car. Legroom is limited, though.

Rear-seat space is tight in most cases because front-seat occupants have to use most of the available travel. Boot space is OK for such a small car.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ You can't help but feel good when you drive it
- ✔ A real car, not a toy
- ✔ Fuel efficiency that's comparable with a hybrid
- ✔ Comfortable ride in most situations

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Fiat's reliability record doesn't inspire confidence
- ✘ So so dynamics
- ✘ Twin Air models way overpriced compared with the VW Up.

SPEX (Lounge)
- Made in Italy
- 875cc two-cylinder petrol/five-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 63kW of power at 5500rpm/145Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 11 seconds
- 3.6L/100km highway; 4.4L/100km city. 95 octane premium. CO^2 emissions are 90gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, a single CD player with steering wheel controls, 15-inch alloys, the Blue&Me system with USB connectivity and Bluetooth, a leather-wrapped steering wheel and gear lever
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...
Toyota Prius C, Renault Clio

FORD **ECOSPORT** FROM **$20,790**



The compact SUV class isn't new — Honda's 1999 HR-V is considered a pioneer — but in the last 12 months or so it has taken off with a boatload of new models.

All of them — from the Ford EcoSport to the Holden Trax, Peugeot 208, Nissan Juke and Suzuki S-Cross — spring from their respective Fiesta, Barina, 208, Micra and Swift hatchback siblings.

The Ford EcoSport kicks off from $20,790 for the 1.5-litre petrol Ambiente manual, which makes this model the cheapest in the class. Other variants include the mid-range Trend (from $22,290) and range-topping Titanium (from $25,790).

Like others in this class, the front-wheel-drive EcoSport has no off-road pretensions, though it should be pretty handy on most dirt roads with 200mm of ground clearance (allowing a 550mm wading depth) and 4x4-style tailgate-mounted full-size spare.

Two petrol engines are available: Ford's high-tech 1.0-litre three-cylinder EcoBoost turbo, delivering 92kW of power at 6000rpm and 190Nm of torque between 1400 and 4500rpm, and a 1.5-litre four-cylinder naturally aspirated Duratec unit with 82kW at 6300rpm and 140Nm at 4400rpm.

Belying its tiny capacity, and famously compact enough to sit within an A4-sized piece of paper, the sophisticated, refined 1.0-litre turbo is an International Engine of the Year winner.

Paired only to a slick-shifting five-speed manual (an auto is at least a year away), it provides spirited step-off acceleration, backed up by a wide spread of torque for excellent response when required.

In contrast, the 1.5-litre engine is lethargic, particularly as tested with Ford's six-speed dual-clutch Powershift auto, which adds $2000 to Ambiente and Trend 1.5-litre and is standard on Titanium. Slow off the mark and noisy when pushed, it is best suited to city or urban-only driving environments.

Avoid the bigger engine anyway, because the 1.0-litre better exploits the tight, agile and controllable Fiesta chassis, offering crisp steering, reassuring roadholding and a comfortable ride.

It also averages around 0.8L/100km less fuel than the 1.5-litre engine.

Engineered in Brazil and built in India, the EcoSport boasts a deceptively spacious five-seater interior, thanks in part to a well-shaped rear bench designed to take three (skinny) adults.

Fiesta owners will recognise the fussy, button-splattered dash, which features clear dials, excellent ventilation, and a phalanx of controls as part of Ford's standard SYNC voice-controlled infotainment system, incorporating Bluetooth telephony and audio streaming.

Perched up high, the driver enjoys excellent forward vision, though there is no reversing camera available, while closer scrutiny will reveal some rough finishes and cheapo plastics. Worth noting, too, is the fact that the EcoSport scored only four stars in EuroNCAP crash tests. Any new 2014 model should really score five stars.

That back-door-mounted spare has allowed the engineers to provide a low, flat floor with useful cargo space, easily extended (with the rear seat folded and tumbled forward) in two-seater wagon mode.

The Ford EcoSport is the driver's choice in this class, underpinned by value pricing, excellent packaging and — in the award-winning 1.0-litre EcoBoost engine's case — outstanding fuel efficiency.

Put the Ford EcoSport on your shortlist. If you have never test driven a car with such a small engine before, you'll be amazed at how good it is.

By Byron Mathioudakis

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value pricing
- ✔ 1.0-litre turbo power, economy and refinement
- ✔ Best-in-class handling
- ✔ Roomy interior
- ✔ Full-size spare

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Listless, noisy 1.5-litre
- ✘ Both engines need premium unleaded
- ✘ No auto option yet with 1.0-litre
- ✘ Cheap dash plastics and some rough edges
- ✘ No reversing camera
- ✘ Some road noise on coarse bitumen

SPEX (Titanium 1.0-litre EcoBoost)

- Made in India
- 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbo petrol/five-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 92kW of power at 6000rpm, 190Nm of torque from 1400-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 12.7 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 6.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 131g/km
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, voice-activated Bluetooth with audio streaming, 15-inch steel wheels; Trend adds 16-inch alloy wheels, cruise control, glovebox cooler; Titanium adds roof rails, leather upholstery, automatic air, auto-dimming rear-view mirror, automatic wipers and headlights and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...

Holden Trax, Peugeot 208, Nissan Juke, Suzuki S-Cross

FORD **FOCUS** FROM **$20,290**



Ford's Focus range features hatch and sedan bodies, four powertrains and five spec levels.

Base model is the $20,290 Ambiente hatch, with a 92kW 1.6-litre petrol engine and five-speed manual. A six-speed automated manual adds $2300. Ambiente sedan is the same price.

Trend hatch runs a 125kW 2.0-litre direct-injection petrol engine with the same transmission choices, at $22,290/$24,590. Trend auto-only petrol sedan is also $24,590.

Trend hatch and sedan are also available with a 120kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel, with the auto only, both priced at $28,090.

Sport man/auto 2.0 petrol hatch is $25,890/$28,190; Sport 2.0 turbodiesel auto hatch is $32,990.

Titanium auto-only petrol hatch and sedan are both $32,990. The 2.0 turbodiesel hatch, also with the auto, is $36,490 in Titanium specification.

The Focus ST hot hatch, with the same 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine as the Falcon, tuned for 184kW and with a six speed manual, is $38,290.

The current model plays to the Focus' traditional strengths: chiefly excellent dynamics, a comfortable ride and a refined, solid character. However, in a couple of important respects it's disappointing.

The 2.0-litre direct-injection petrol engine is sluggish and unresponsive until it's spinning at high revs. It's refined and economical, but it lacks the strong midrange punch of the turbocharged 1.4-litre Golf and Holden Cruze engines.

I haven't driven the diesel in this model but it was clearly the best engine in the previous Focus line-up. I'd suggest it probably still is.

The 2.0-petrol's cause isn't helped by the strangely calibrated automated manual, which, in Drive, goes straight to the high gears to minimise fuel consumption, then shows a fierce resistance to kicking down, when you need a bit of "go forward", and give the pedal a prod. Even in Sport mode, it takes far too long to kick down, then often seems to pick a lower gear than the one you want.

You can shift gears yourself using a rocker switch on the lever, but the manual is a much more efficient option.

VW's seven-speed DSG transmission and its seamless integration with the Golf's 1.4-litre engines leave Ford's efforts here looking very ordinary.

Handling is arguably best in class. The Focus is agile, planted and takes corners in a much more sporty manner than any rival.

The electric power steering is pin-sharp, while the ride, though less supple than the Golf, is compliant and comfortable.

Interior space is average but boot volume is restricted by the sloping roofline.

The Titanium driver's seat is luxurious and supportive. The dash layout is contrived and fussy, overly complicated and festooned with buttons. Compare it with the classy, efficient Golf dash and you'll wonder what they were thinking. Certainly not about making life easy for the driver.

A round of price cuts in late 2012, following a change from German to Thai-sourcing, means that Focus is now competitive in the showroom.

It's got its work cut out against the newer Mazda3 and VW Golf VII, though, which are now the clear class leaders. At base model pricepoints below $22,000, the Toyota Corolla and Hyundai i30 also make very strong value for money cases.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Best-in-class handling
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✔ Five-star safety
- ✔ Compliant, controlled ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Petrol engine lacks decent punch in the midrange
- ✘ Six-speed box very slow to kick down
- ✘ Fussy, complicated dash layout

SPEX (Titanium 2.0 petrol)

- Made in Thailand
- 2.0L direct-injection petrol/six-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 125kW of power at 6600rpm/202Nm of torque at 4450rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.8 seconds
- 5.2L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO_2 emissions are 156gkm.
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, iPod connectivity, Bluetooth, voice control, 18-inch alloys, cloth/leather upholstery, heated front seats, parking sensors, cruise control with speed limiter, sunroof
- Redbook future values 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...

Hyundai i30, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, Volkswagen Golf

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



Get a personalised Valuation Certificate for just $22!

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY

FORD **FALCON** FROM **$35,900**



The FG X Falcon range kicks off at $35,900 for the base model. The G Series begins with the G6E at $40,110 and the G6E Turbo at $46,550. All run a six-speed automatic as standard.

The base model and G6E are available, at the same price, with either the 179kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged Ecoboost engine or the mighty 195kW 4.0-litre straight six we know and love.

The 2.0-litre Ecoboost engine is already used to excellent effect in the Volvo S60/V60/XC60 and Range Rover Evoque. Ford Australia did a major engineering job, swinging it around 90 degrees to install it for the first time in rear-wheel-drive architecture, with a bespoke calibrated six-speed ZF automatic transmission.

It launches the Falcon to 100km/h in 7.2 seconds, just a couple of tenths slower than the six. You have to lean harder on the pedal to get it up and at 'em, but there's a solid 353Nm of torque available from just 2000rpm; it then revs out smooth, clean and hard to just past 6500rpm. On test, it did 6-7L/100km on the highway and elevens in town, on regular unleaded. Impressive numbers for a big sedan.

Of course, the 4.0-litre still hauls from the basement like a champion and when you lean on the pedal it goes hard too.

The 270kW G6E Turbo is still the fastest six-pack in town.

Ford claims it's a 5.0-second car to 100km/h but the best I could do was 5.4 seconds — hardly hanging around.

It's also half a second quicker than the 6.0-litre V8/six-speed auto Holden SS and Calais.

Ford also offers a stand-alone liquid propane injection system on the Falcon, badged EcoLPi, also matched with a six-speed automatic transmission.

It's available on the base model for an extra $2500.

The EcoLPi 4.0-litre produces 198kW and 409Nm, so performance is actually superior to the petrol engine. Average fuel consumption is 12.5L/100km; that's still a lot higher than the petrol engine's 9.9L/100km, but then LPG is a lot cheaper than petrol, so do the sums to see if the LPG option works for you.

I haven't driven the EcoLPi, but colleagues report it's impossible to pick it from the petrol engine.

The Falcon's six-speed ZF auto transmission is notably smoother than the GM six-speed auto and less trouble-prone as well.

Two fewer cylinders on the Ecoboost models also means 60kg less metal hanging forward of the front axles and you can really feel this in the way the Falcon four points into a tight corner more immediately and accurately, understeers less, is more stable under brakes and feels agile and balanced compared with the nose-heavy six.



FG X Falcon upgrades also include a new front end, modelled on the Mustang which arrives later this year, and new alloy wheels. Front parking sensors and a reversing camera are also standard across the range. The interior gets a makeover too, including Ford's SYNC multimedia system, with an eight-inch colour touch screen, digital radio, voice control, emergency assist communication, Wi-Fi hot spot capability and two USB slots.

The Falcon sedan, ute and Territory you see here will be the last cars off the line in Broadmeadows, Victoria.

Ford will stop manufacturing all Falcon-based models in 2016. The Falcon nameplate will be "retired" as well. As a result, Falcon's already weak resale values have now collapsed.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Comfortable ride, especially on rough country roads
- ✔ The Ecoboost engine does the job nicely in the Falcon
- ✔ The 4.0-litre turbo is a rocket

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Steering shake with big wheels
- ✘ Six-cylinder models are ponderous in tight corners
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Space-saver spare

SPEX (G6E Ecoboost)

- Made in Australia
- 2.0L four cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed auto/rear-wheel drive
- 179kW of power at 5500rpm/353Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.2 seconds
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- 6.4L/100km highway; 12.2L/100km city; 91 octane. CO^2 emissions are 201gkm
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, automatic air, digital radio, Bluetooth, two USB ports, automatic headlights, 17-inch alloys, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera and a leather-wrapped steering wheel
- G6E adds navigation with speed camera warnings, a traffic message channel and advanced graphics, 18-inch alloy wheels and leather upholstery
- G6E Turbo has 10-spoke 19-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 34%; 5yr: 23%

compare with...

Holden Commodore, Nissan Altima, Toyota Aurion

FORD **FIESTA** FROM **$15,825**



The Ford Fiesta hatch range opens with the 82kW 1.5-litre/five-speed manual Ambiente at $15,825; a six-speed automated manual adds $2000. Trend specification (as tested) adds a further $2000.

The 92kW 1.0-litre turbopetrol Fiesta Sport Ecoboost is priced at $20,525, or $22,525 with the six-speed automated transmission. This award-winning engine produces remarkable performance for its capacity and averages just 4.9L/100km, with CO^2 emissions of 115gkm.

The hot rod Fiesta ST, with a 134kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual drivetrain, is a great drive, the pick of the baby hot hatch class and a dead set bargain at $25,990.

Unfortunately, that's not quite the case with the 1.5-litre powered models. The 1.5 has less power and torque than the 1.6 it replaced, so although it goes OK with a few revs on board, it's pretty gutless elsewhere.

The Fiesta is often hesitant and unresponsive, especially when you need a bit of instant zip in traffic. I'd suggest that the 1.0-litre Sport should be a much more tractable engine.

The suspension is firmer than average, so body control is disciplined — there's very little roll in corners and bumps do not unsettle the Fiesta to the same extent as most small cars.

The ride is acceptably smooth on most surfaces.

Driver's seat comfort and support are better than you usually get at this price.

Fiesta is an A-grade small car and arguably the best handler in the class, but the Kia Rio and VW Polo offer stronger performance, superior quality and better value, especially the Rio.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★☆	Comfort and refinement ★★½☆☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Better handling and steering than most small cars
- ✔ Ford's SYNC infotainment system
- ✔ ST is a bang for your bucks winner

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Indecisive, slow six-speed
- ✘ Quality isn't what it was on the Euro imports
- ✘ 1.5 is lethargic and unresponsive

SPEX (1.5 Trend)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.5L four-cylinder/six-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 82kW of power at 6300rpm/140Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0–100km/h N/A
- 4.7L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 137gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, Bluetooth with audio streaming, voice activation and mobile phone connectivity, 15-inch alloys, cruise control, capped price servicing.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Kia Rio, Suzuki Swift, VW Polo

FORD **KUGA** FROM **$27,990**



Ford's Kuga range opens with the 110kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel-drive Ambiente, priced at $27,990.

All-wheel-drive models begin with the 134kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol Ambiente, with a six-speed automatic, at $31,490.

Trend specification includes the same drivetrain, at $36,240, plus a 120kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed dual-clutch automated manual, at $39,240.

Top-of-the-range Titanium is available with the same drivetrains, priced at $44,470 and $47,470.

The 1.6-litre turbopetrol engine, in both 110kW and 134kW tunes, likes a few revs before it delivers the goods. Both versions produces the same 240Nm of torque, so neither is particularly strong or responsive below 3000rpm or so. The 2.0-litre turbodiesel is a much stronger engine across the lower end of the rev range.

The Kuga is at the front end of the class as far as dynamic ability is concerned. The ride may be too firm and sharp for some, especially on Titanium's 19-inch wheels and low-profile tyres.

You sit low, tightly wrapped in a twin cockpit-style cabin. Some will love this pseudo-sporty driving position; others will feel it compromises vision around the car. Titanium's tailgate can be opened and closed by flicking your foot under the rear bumper — handy when you've got two-and-a-half armfuls of wriggling kids and the shopping.

The back seat is narrow and shaped for two, with reasonable legroom. The boot is at the smaller end of the class.

As we went to press, an update was due, including a new 110kW 1.5-litre base turbopetrol engine, plus a 132kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel and 176kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol replacing the current engines in Trend and Titanium.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ One of the best-handling SUVs
- ✔ Comfortable, supportive driver's seat
- ✔ Power tailgate on Titanium
- ✔ Torquey, refined diesel
- ✔ Titanium is loaded

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No camera on Ambiente or Trend
- ✘ Overly firm ride
- ✘ Dated, tizzy dash design
- ✘ Smallish boot and narrow back seat
- ✘ Pricey

SPEX (1.6 Trend auto)

- Made in Spain
- 1.6L four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 134kW of power at 5700rpm/ 240Nm of torque from 1600-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.5L/100km highway; 10.7L/100km city: 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 186gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloys, SYNC in-car connectivity with voice control, Bluetooth, digital radio, emergency 000 assistance, sports seats with leather inserts, dual-zone air, automatic headlights and wipers
- Redbook future values: (Trend) 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Honda CRV, Mazda CX5, Subaru Forester, Volvo XC60

FORD **FALCON XR6/XR8** FROM **$35,590**



The FG X Falcon XR sedan range opens at $35,590 with the XR6; the XR6 Turbo is priced at $42,990. The EcoLPi gas-powered XR6 is $38,090. The XR8 is $52,490.

The XR6 runs the base 4.0-litre Falcon donk with 195kW of power at 6000rpm and 391Nm of torque at 3250rpm.

It's matched with a six-speed manual; a six-speed automatic is a $2200 option on most models. The auto is standard on the EcoLPi.

The force-fed 4.0-litre in the XR6 Turbo produces 270kW of power at 5250rpm and 533Nm of torque from 2000–4750rpm. A six-speed manual is standard and a six-speed auto adds $2200.

The 4.0-litre six is loaded with torque and hauls off the bottom like no other six does. Top-end performance, though, is less refined and responsive than the direct-injection 3.6-litre V6 in the Commodore SV6.

You get very serious bang for your bucks with the XR6 Turbo which, bolted to the six-speed auto, takes just 5.4 seconds to reach 100km/h.

The 335kW/570Nm 5.0-litre supercharged V8 in the XR8 is lifted straight from the now extinct FPV GT. It's got grunt unlimited, but supercharger whine is intrusive.

The XR's home-grown engineering really comes to the fore on a country road, where it displays tight body control on rough bitumen, intuitive steering loaded with feel and feedback and great competence at speed.

The sports suspension on XRs makes a big difference. The XR8 gets the GT's top shelf R-Spec package, which includes a firmer suspension tune again, stiffer mounts and bushings, four piston front Brembos, sharper steering and 275 rear rubber.

In tight corners the XR6 Falcons can still feel nose-heavy, ponderous and underbraked.

FG X XR upgrades include a new front end modelled on the Mustang which arrives later this year and new alloy wheels. Front parking sensors, rain sensing wipers and a reversing camera are also standard across the range. The interior gets a makeover too, including Ford's SYNC multimedia system, with an eight-inch colour touch screen, digital radio, voice control, emergency assist communication, Wi-Fi hot spot capability and two USB slots.

The XR8 is going out in style, but FPV GT owners would be justifiably ropeable because it's really just a GT with a massive — as in $20K or more — discount. So much for GT resale values and exclusivity.

The XR6 Turbo and FPV F6, which feature bespoke Ford Australia engineering, will likely be the Falcons that in future years are most highly prized by collectors.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★½☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Great value for money and better resale values than other Falcons
- ✔ Quick, composed and comfortable
- ✔ XR6 Turbo is a weapon
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Fuel bills
- ✘ Steering shake with big wheels
- ✘ Space-saver spare
- ✘ Uneven boot floor

SPEX (XR6 Turbo auto)

- Made in Australia
- 4.0L turbocharged petrol six-cylinder/six-speed auto/rear-wheel drive
- 270kW of power at 5250rpm/533Nm of torque from 2000–4750rpm
- 0–100km/h in 5.4 seconds
- 8.5L/100km highway; 17.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 278gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, front and rear parking sensors, digital radio, two USB slots, Bluetooth, voice activation, automatic headlights, 18-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...

Holden Commodore SV6 and SS

FORD **TERRITORY** FROM **$36,990**



Turbodiesel power and the venerable Falcon 4.0-litre petrol six are available in the SZ MkII Territory range. The 140kW 2.7-litre turbodiesel V6, as used in the Land Rover Discovery until 2013, is matched with a six-speed automatic.

The 195kW 4.0 petrol engine is available only with rear-wheel drive. The base 4.0 TX is $36,990 and the TX 2.7 TDCi is $40,240, or $45,240 with all-wheel drive.

Mid spec TS prices for the same drivetrains are $41,740, $44,490 and $49,990.

The top of the line Titanium, also with the same drivetrain lineup, costs $48,490, $51,740 and $56,740. A six-speed automatic is standard.

Is the turbodiesel worth the extra $3250 over the petrol? If fuel economy is more important than performance, yes. Although the 2.7 is a relatively old engine and not particuarly fuel efficient, it will return much better economy in town, where the petrol engine can nudge 20L/100km.

However, the 2.7 scores just three out of ten (a higher score being better) on the *Green Vehicle Guide* air pollution rating scale and a poor 2.5 stars out of five overall.

There's absolutely no point spending the extra $5000 on all-wheel drive unless you are going to spend most of your time on dirt roads or towing heavy loads. The all-wheel-drive turbodiesels will pull up to 2700kg.

The torque convertor isn't particularly efficient, so the Territory diesel is languid off the line, but once rolling it's impressively refined and tractable with a relaxed, easy gait. The petrol Territory still offers much stronger and more responsive performance, though.

It takes only eight seconds to hit 100km/h; the 2.7 TDCi takes 10.8 seconds.

Ford introduced electric power steering, significantly reduced noise, vibration and harshness, and tightened up the suspension on the SZ model.

The Ford Territory's dynamics are more confident and composed than rivals like the Holden Captiva, Hyundai Santa Fe and Toyota Kluger. The Territory is supremely comfortable and close to the Mercedes M-Class in its overall ride/handling compromise.

Ford's sophisticated SYNC infotainment system, which includes digital radio and emergency contact assistance, is standard, as is a reversing camera and parking sensors at both ends, but interior fit and finish is fairly rough with a few squeaks and sizzles evident.

Territory has also given some owners grief with engine, steering, suspension and brake problems.

There's heaps of head and legroom in the middle seat.

The optional third row folds flat into the load floor and there's a bit of fiddling around involved in raising or lowering it.

It can carry average-sized adults on short trips if you push the middle row forward to provide some legroom.

The roof-hinged tailgate can be opened as a whole or the window only. The cargo area is large, has a floor that's low and easy to load and you get a full-size spare as well.

In 2016 the Territory will cease production, as Ford pulls out of Australian manufacturing.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★½☆☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Great use of interior space and comfortable seats
- ✔ Stable, secure dynamics
- ✔ 2.7 TDCi refinement, 4.0-litre performance

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Thirsty in town
- ✘ 2.7 TDCi is sluggish off the line
- ✘ Ford's quality record is poor
- ✘ Brakes lack bite and feel on light pedal pressures

SPEX (Titanium 2.7TDCi AWD)

- Made in Australia
- 2.7L V6/six-speed automatic/rear- or all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 4000rpm/440Nm of torque at 1900rpm
- 0–100km/h in 10.8 seconds (AWD)
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- 7.3L/100km highway; 11.9L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 236gkm.
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, parking sensors, Bluetooth, digital radio, emergency contact assistance, voice control, reversing camera and 17-inch alloy wheels. TS adds 18-inch alloys, automatic air, upgraded audio and a third row seat. Titanium also includes leather upholstery, rear-seat Alpine DVD system, navigation, 18-inch alloys and extra body-coloured exterior trim
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Mazda CX9, Toyota Kluger

HOLDEN **CAPTIVA** FROM **$26,490**



The South Korean-built Captiva's success is based on the fact that it's a good value family SUV, especially the seven seaters. Regularly advertised drive-away offers, further strengthen its appeal.

The five-seater Captiva 5 LT with front-wheel drive is available with a 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, with 123kW of power and 230Nm of torque. Transmission choices are six-speed manual at $26,490 or automatic, at $28,690. LT-Z auto is $31,690.

The Captiva 5 also offers a 2.2-litre turbodiesel option with 135kW and 400Nm, only with the automatic all-wheel drivetrain, priced at $32,690 for LT and $35,690 for LT-Z.

Both of these engines, plus the 3.0-litre direct injection petrol V6 as used in the Commodore (also with E85 ethanol compatibility), are also offered in the seven-seater Captiva 7.

The base Captiva 7 LS is front-wheel drive with either the 2.4-litre petrol ($30,490) or 2.2-litre turbodiesel ($33,490), both with the six-speed automatic. That's very sharp pricing for a seven-seater SUV. The 3.0-litre V6 produces 190kW of power and 288Nm of torque. It averages 10.1L/100km.

It's available in the Captiva 7 LT all-wheel drive — only with the automatic — at $36,490. So is the 2.2-litre turbodiesel, which costs $37,490. Both of these drivetrains are also offered in the Captiva 7 LTZ, priced at $40,490 and $41,490 respectively.

The two petrol engines are adequate, though the 3.0-litre V6 lacks torque.

The 2.4-litre four works pretty well with the six-speed auto, but the Captiva is a hefty unit so the 2.2 turbodiesel is still the drivetrain of choice, with the best combination of performance and economy by quite a way.

The Captiva's not in the same handling league as the Territory or Kia Sorento.

The ride on 17-inch wheels is fine; on the LTZ's 19-inchers it's awful, with the car pitching and bouncing to the extent that your kids might complain about feeling sick. Or worse.

Space efficiency is one of the Captiva's strengths. Two individual back seats in the seven-seater fold into the floor, so you can raise one and use the adjacent space for gear.

As back seats go, they're more spacious, supportive and comfortable than most rivals and suitable for kids up to teen age, while boot space is pretty generous too.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety (ANCAP)
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Mid-spec LT is value for money
- ✔ Strong performance from 2.2-litre turbodiesel and the 2.4-litre petrol engine isn't too bad either
- ✔ Efficient, versatile interior packaging
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Nausea-inducing ride on the LTZ
- ✘ 3.0 V6 lacks torque and chews juice
- ✘ A few squeaks and rattles in the cabin

SPEX (2.2 t/d LT 4WD)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/ six-speed automatic/on-demand all-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 3800rpm/400Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0–100km/h: N/A
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- 7.0L/100km highway; 10.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 220gkm
- Standard: Captiva includes six airbags, stability control, hill-start assist, rear-park assist, USB, iPod connectivity, 17-inch alloy wheels, cruise control.
- LT adds 18-inch alloys, automatic air and self-levelling rear suspension
- LTZ includes 19-inch alloys, navigation, leather-faced seat upholstery/steering wheel, power-adjustable, heated driver's seat, front-park assist and a rear camera.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Mitsubishi Outlander

HOLDEN **TRAX** FROM **$23,990**



Holden's Trax is a small SUV based on the Barina hatchback. It's only available as a front-wheel drive, so think of it as an interesting take on the compact hatch with an SUV's easy access and high, comfortable seating position.

The base LS five-speed manual is $23,990, the six-speed auto LS is $26,190 and the top-spec LTZ auto is $28,490.

These models are powered by GM's 1.8-litre, four-cylinder petrol engine, which also does service in the Cruze. It's an ageing slugger, but in this application it's pretty good, offering reasonable mid-range pulling power (assisted by quite short gearing), good fuel economy on regular unleaded and greater refinement than expected.

The five-speed manual has a light, acceptably precise action and in fifth at 100km/h, the 1.8 is pulling 3000rpm, so even here you can get useful acceleration when you need it. The six-speed automatic does the job smoothly enough, with a wider ratio spread for more economical top-gear cruising.

A 103kW/200Nm 1.4-litre turbopetrol engine, also used in the Cruze, is matched with a six speed auto also in LTZ specification (which includes 18 inch alloys and a sunroof), priced at $29,990.

Holden's chassis engineers have given the Trax the treatment and for a short, tall-box it handles predictably and confidently, with a secure feel on the road. Body roll is minimal and quality Continental tyres are sticky and quiet. The ride is firm and the steering is feather light and lifeless, with little on-centre feel. Brakes are OK, though the brake/clutch pedals in the manual are very close together.

The driver faces a Barina-style dash, enlivened by crisp, attractive graphics on the MyLink infotainment system touch screen. There's ample driving position adjustability, but like the Commodore, the A pillars do block some of your forward/side vision in corners, especially right-handers.

A rear camera and parking sensors are standard.

Holden's MyLink system offers Siri Eyes Free mode for compatible devices like the iPhone, plus supported apps such as Pandora and Stitcher, which now features a dedicated Holden sports radio station.

You can also download a new satellite navigation app called BringGo to your phone and pair it to MyLink. It gives you a full-featured touch-screen navigation system, with Google Places search and 3-D maps, that you can take anywhere for a fraction of the price you would usually pay for a dedicated in-car system.

There's plenty of handy storage, including two gloveboxes, several smaller nooks and crannies, big door bins and a tray under the front passenger's seat in the LTZ.

The driver's seat is supportive and comfortable, as is the rear bench, which has two Isofix mounts plus conventional child-restraint anchors.

The boot's not huge — volume with all seats in use is slightly less than a Golf — but it's practical enough, with a 60/40 rear-seat extension, four bag hooks and a no-cost option full-size spare that will fit under the floor. A 240-volt electrical socket, with power supplied by an on-board inverter, is unique to this class and allows you to power or recharge items like cameras or laptops.

As an alternative to the conventional small hatch, the Trax is worth a look. It's a practical, economical car that would be pretty easy to live with.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Big practicality in a small package
- ✔ Comfortable seats
- ✔ Reasonable performance and fuel economy
- ✔ Tidy handling
- ✔ MyLink features and connectivity

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Ride could be a bit rugged on 18-inch-wheel LTZ model
- ✘ Front pillars block some vision
- ✘ Remote-control steering
- ✘ Feels a bit low-rent Daewoo in the cabin

SPEX (LS auto)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 6300rpm/175Nm of torque at 3800rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.0L/100km highway; 10.4L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 179gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, hill-start assist, 16-inch alloy wheels, rear camera and parking sensors, MyLink, Bluetooth, leather-wrapped steering wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Mitsubishi ASX, Nissan Qashqai, Subaru XV, Skoda Yeti, VW Tiguan

HOLDEN **COMMODORE** FROM **$35,490**



Holden's decision to abandon local manufacturing has been well documented, but with extremely aggressive pricing on the VF Commodore range it's clear that Holden wants to keep the car competitive until its demise in 2017.

The VF Commodore sedan range opens with the 3.0-litre V6/six-speed automatic Evoke, priced at $35,490.

The Evoke Sportwagon costs $37,490. The same $2000 premium applies to all Sportwagons over their sedan equivalents.

The SV6 3.6-litre V6/six-speed manual sedan is $36,490; the six-speed auto SV6 is $38,690.

Evoke sedan is also available with VE's 3.6-litre V6 dedicated LPG system, which carries a $2500 price premium over the petrol-powered equivalent.

The Calais, with the same 3.6-litre V6/six-speed auto drivetrain as SV6, is priced at $40,490. Calais V is $47,490 and the Calais V 6.0-litre V8/six-speed automatic is $53,490.

VF isn't a new model because Holden didn't have the cash to do one of those and its local manufacturing future was sufficiently doubtful even several years ago to preclude spending the necessary billion-plus dollars required to develop a new-from-the-wheels-up car.

VF, as the last Australian-engineered rear-wheel-drive Commodore, is instead a comprehensive overhaul of the 2006 VE. It includes an all-new interior, wider availability of high-tech safety and infotainment systems, significant engineering work on electrical systems, body and chassis, plus a nose and tail restyling job.

Drivetrains are unchanged, however new body parts such as an aluminium bonnet and boot lid contributed to weight reductions of up to 43kg (on Evoke), which in turn led to improved performance and, in association with slipperier aerodynamics, a six per cent fuel economy gain.

At a combined average of 8.3L/100km, Evoke is almost on par with the four-cylinder Ecoboost Falcon's 8.1L/100km. The Falcon's 2.0-litre turbo, though, is a sweeter, smoother, stronger engine than Holden's naturally-aspirated 3.0-litre V6.

The Holden engine does a workmanlike job and is kept busy by the six-speed automatic, however it lacks the bottom end and lower mid-range shove you expect from a V6 in a large car. If six-cylinder power is your preference, the extra money on the SV6's 210kW/350Nm 3.6-litre engine is well spent. It's stronger and more responsive right across the rev range and a much happier fit in a car of this size and weight.

Evoke, Calais and Calais V get Holden's FE1 "Comfort" suspension. It's tailor-made for absorbing the vagaries of rough local roads at speed; in town, though, the Evoke can be a bit firm and fussy, especially the Sportwagon.

Electric power steering, here in the lightest of three calibrations, offers precision and responsiveness, particularly on turn in, plus excellent feedback.

In tight corners, your line of communication with the wheels, at both ends of the car, is clear and direct.

The Evoke Sportwagon I tested handled a rough country road light years better than any medium-sized SUV and in corners was much better balanced and more secure.

It also felt more convincing than the Calais V V8 Sportwagon. That car's front suspension, still FE1 but with a specific tune for the heavier V8 engine, didn't properly control body movement on undulations, generating excessive front-end bounce. Body roll and understeer also felt exaggerated compared with the lighter Evoke V6, even with the Calais V's considerably wider, stickier 245/40 tyres on 19-inch alloy wheels. Evoke runs 16-inch alloys with 225/60 tyres.

In VE II guise, Calais was a sporty-ish handler. It's not now. If that's your preference, the SV6 or SS-V, with the firmer FE2 suspension tune, are the best models to go for.

Commodore's brakes were improved on VF, with stiffer mounts for the hardware on the

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆





firewall and a retuned booster. VF's pedal feels much firmer, and the brakes themselves bite harder and more progressively than on VE. Lighter weight also helps reduce braking effort, wear and stopping distances.

Inside, the industrial-grade plastics and most of the rough edges of VE disappeared from VF. Holden did a complete renovation on Commodore's interior, giving it a GM family look. It could almost be a bigger, luxurious Cruze. Richer materials feature throughout, plus an eight-inch colour touchscreen infotainment system, with internet radio, voice control, Bluetooth and app-streaming capability.

It's a bit over the top in a couple of respects, especially the fake coarse weave fabric (Evoke) and suede (Calais) trim which wraps around the doors into the front of the dash in a flourish reminiscent of some bad taste 1980s interiors. There's an excess of fake alloy and chrome, too, in the Calais. If it was real, they might get away with it, but it's very obviously not.

A rear camera, electric parking brake, dual-zone air, parking sensors at both ends and automatic parking are standard on Evoke. You can also automatically start the car using the remote, while the boot lid opens by itself when you push the relevant button on the fob.

When you close the Sportwagon's tailgate, it automatically latches shut.

You still sit deep in the Commodore. Front seats are comfortable enough, if unsupportive in Evoke. Holden now uses a cheap lever/spring mechanism to adjust the backrest angle on Evoke (and SV6 and SS), which gives less precise adjustment than the previous rotating wheel adjuster.

The Calais' driver's seat is better bolstered and properly supportive when cornering. Holden claims you'll now "walk away with no injuries at all" from a 50km/h side impact in VF.

Pelvis protection in the front side airbags, three Isofix restraint anchors in the back seat, belt reminders for all positions, a re-engineered front end to more effectively absorb crash forces and minimise pedestrian injury, plus four-way adjustable front-seat head restraints contribute to a formidable crash protection safety package on VF.

The stability control system has been updated to include Trailer Sway control. SV6 and Calais include a full size alloy spare wheel.

Calais adds leather upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels with 245/40 tyres, a colour driver information display and LED running lights.

Calais V gets rain-sensing wipers, heated front seats, 19-inch alloy wheels, navigation and, in the sedan, Bose speakers and a sunroof.

It also includes the worksburger safety specification, with lane departure warning, a forward collision alert and a head-up display.

Although new seats have been fitted, there's basically the same amount of interior space up front, in the back and in sedan and Sportwagon boots.

The latter has a low, easy load floor that when extended with the 60/40 split-fold rear-seat backs is fully flat.

The engineering upgrades to VF Commodore and Calais have brought tangible improvements to the way the car drives, particularly the Evoke, and it's now a safer, smoother, quieter car, with a lot more gear for considerably less money.

Best ever Commodore? Absolutely. What a shame it's also the last.



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Great value for money
- ✔ Spacious, comfortable interior
- ✔ Agile, secure handling
- ✔ Precise steering and strong braking
- ✔ Big dollar safety specification
- ✔ Smooth, quiet ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Calais V interior decor is OTT
- ✘ V8 is nose heavy and stretches FE1 suspension control
- ✘ Cheap, imprecise driver's seat backrest adjustment on Evoke
- ✘ 3.0-litre V6 lacks torque
- ✘ Bland sheetmetal
- ✘ Base-model Commodore resale values are weak

SPEX (Evoke)

- Made in Australia
- 3.0-litre V6/six-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 185kW of power at 6700rpm/290Nm of torque at 2900rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.5L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 198gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors, automatic parking, touch screen audio, Bluetooth with audio streaming, app streaming and internet radio, 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...

Ford Falcon, Toyota Aurion, VW Passat

Search brand new cars on your mobile

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

COMMODORE SS FROM $41,990



Holden's VF Commodore SS 6.0-litre V8/six-speed manual costs $42,990.

The six-speed auto SS is priced at $45,190.

Over and above base Evoke specification (see the VF Commodore test), the SS, like the 3.6-litre SV6, gets 18-inch alloys, LED running lights, sports seats, a body kit and spoiler.

The SS-V at $46,490 (man) and $48,690 (auto) includes leather, 19-inch alloys and navigation.

SS-V Redline, at $52,490/$54,690, adds Brembo brakes, forged 19-inch alloys, a head-up display, forward collision alert, lane departure warning, Bose sound and a sunroof.

All automatic variants are also available as the Sportwagon, at a price premium of $2000.

The SS and SSV interiors are the most attractive in the VF range. You get a big, supportive, luxurious driver's seat, pukka dark trim with red lighting, plus piano black dash and fake carbon-fibre trim. It's more understated (and tasteful) than the "bling gone berserk" Calais, though there's a lot of fake alloy and chrome around this cabin too. The SS used to be a chrome-free zone.

The SS, SV6 and SS-V get FE2 suspension, with firmer damping than FE1, plus a faster steering ratio just off centre for improved turn-in response and agility, speed-variable assistance, and greater feedback at the wheel.

Holden has recalibrated the steering on all VF models for 2015 to further improve linearity and precision.

Redline adds paddle shifters for the automatic, performance suspension with larger-diameter dampers and rebound springs, larger stabiliser bars, 245/40-19 (front) and 275/35-19 (rear) Bridgestone RE0505A tyres on bespoke split rim black alloys, Sports steering with a driver-selectable Track mode (which also winds back the stability control intervention threshold), and launch control.

The V8 still goes hard, of course, but the major change from VE II to VF is in the superior shift quality and timing of the automatic. It still has the occasional erratic shift here and there, but is much smoother and less intrusive overall.

The SS has become quite luxurious in VF guise. FE2 suspension, once Holden's firmest tune, now delivers a supple, quiet ride even on relatively low-profile tyres. Exaggerated rear-end squat driving out of a tight corner is nice in that you can really feel the rear wheels' state of grip, however it does make the steering go light, which also amplifies understeer.

You've got to be hammering it for this to be a problem, though. You're also in the wrong model. The SS has become the Commodore you would pick for a 1000km day, doing it in effortless, luxurious style.

You could do this easily in the SSV Redline, too, such is the improvement in refinement and comfort across the VF range.

The Redline's firmer FE3 suspension, more direct steering, wider rear rubber, adjustable traction control and serious brakes make it a wonderful car to punt at speed or through a set of tight corners. It is one of the best balanced, most agile performance sedans you'll ever drive, and the highlight of the VF range.

As Holden prepares to kill off the Commodore in 2017, it's at least offering a great muscle car as its last hurrah. The VF Redline will surely become a collectable in future years.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★½
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Bargain prices for a serious V8 muscle car
- ✔ Especially Redline, which is a steal
- ✔ SS is a superb GT sedan
- ✔ Comfortable ride
- ✔ Engaging, agile handling
- ✔ Sharp steering
- ✔ Attractive, well-equipped cabin
- ✔ SS holds its resale value reasonably well

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Cheap, imprecise driver's seat backrest adjustment mechanism
- ✘ Space-saver spare
- ✘ Softer sheetmetal looks bland compared with VE
- ✘ Think front pillars, small side mirrors and wind noise around front doors still annoy

SPEX (SS AUTO)

- Made in Australia
- 6.0-litre V8/six-speed automatic/ rear-wheel drive
- 260kW of power at 5700rpm/517Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 8.5L/100km highway; 17.0L/100km city; 91 octane, CO^2 emissions are 274gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, sports seats, 18-inch alloys, body kit, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors, automatic parking, touch-screen audio, Bluetooth with audio streaming, app streaming and internet radio
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 29%

compare with...

Falcon XR6 Turbo and XR8

HOLDEN **VF UTE** FROM **$33,490**



The VF reinforces the Holden ute's position as the world's most sophisticated, capable and safe pickup truck, a unique vehicle that, when Holden ceases local manufacture in 2017, will surely become a collectable, as evidenced by extremely strong resale values already.

The VF ute, particularly the SV6 and SS variants, is Holden's two-door sports car. It just happens to have a very big boot.

VF ute prices start at $33,490 for the 3.0-litre V6/six-speed automatic Evoke.

The 3.6-litre SV6 six-speed manual is also $33,490. SS is $39,490, SS-V is $42,990 and SS-V Redline is $48,990.

The auto adds $2200 to these prices.

VF ute gets all of the VF Commodore sedan improvements detailed on previous pages and its equipment levels are comparable with the equivalent Commodore sedan and Sportwagon too.

I drove the SV6 manual.

This engine's power and torque outputs are unchanged in VF, as is gearing in the Aisin-Warner six-speed manual.

Aerodynamic improvements, lighter mass, electric power steering and drivetrain calibration changes deliver an improvement in fuel economy, from a combined average of 9.8L/100km in VE II to 9.0L/100km in VF, still on 91 octane regular.

The 3.6-litre is a much more characterful, willing engine than the base 3.0-litre V6.

In the relatively light ute, its 210kW and 350Nm generate serious mid-range urge, with a muscular, responsive top end as well, accompanied by a deep, hungry note.

The six-speed manual is a quicker, lighter shifter than the Tremec box in V8 models, but it's full of big, industrial-strength gears so it still pays to take your time with the lever and use the clutch with finesse.

Handling is outstanding. In fact, at the launch, held on Holden's closed Ride and Handling test track at Lang Lang in Victoria, the SV6 ute was a sportier, better-balanced handler than the SS sedan.

It's got firmer suspension at the back to suit a load-carrying brief and less weight in the nose so there's less body roll and it's better balanced through corners with less rear-end squat and understeer when driving out under hard acceleration. The ride's firmer but still comfortable and compliant.

If you're after a sedan, the SV6 would be worth a test drive. If the ute's handling ability is a guide, its lighter weight and finer balance might well swing the handling argument the SV6's way compared with the SS sedan. That car now feels like a true V8 GT, so there's probably quite a difference in character between SV6 and SS sedans.

SV6 and SS both run 18-inch alloy wheels with 245/45 Bridgestone tyres.

Equipment levels in SV6 are as per SS, so you get big, supportive sports seats, albeit with less travel than in the sedan. Still, most people will be able to find a comfortable driving position.

The low-cost lever/spring mechanism for adjusting the driver's seat is a backward step. Some will find it difficult to get the backrest angle right.

As before, storage in the ute includes a big glovebox and centre console box, plus extra space and a deep well in the floor behind the seats. A couple of netted bins, approximately 200mm deep and 500mm wide, are recessed under the tray, while netted document pockets are also provided.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The most practical two-door sports car you can buy
- ✔ Muscular, tuneful 3.6 V6
- ✔ Smooth-shifting six-speed manual
- ✔ The best handling ute in the world
- ✔ Also the safest
- ✔ Comfortable seats
- ✔ Very strong resale values
- ✔ Will be highly collectable in future years

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Driver's seat backrest adjustment mechanism is off a $13,990 car
- ✘ Leaf spring, live axle rear-end Falcon is still the go if you need to carry a heavy load

SPEX (SV6 MANUAL)

- Made in Australia
- 3.6-litre V6/six-speed manual/rear-wheel drive
- 210kW of power at 6400rpm/350Nm of torque at 2900rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 7.1L/100km highway; 12.2L/100km city, 91 octane, CO^2 emissions are 215gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, sports seats, 18-inch alloys, body kit, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors, automatic parking, touch-screen audio, Bluetooth with audio streaming, app streaming and internet radio
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 71%; 5yr: 57%

compare with...

Ford Falcon ute

HOLDEN **CRUZE** FROM **$19,890**



The Holden Cruze sedan and hatch, which have been built in Australia since late 2011, will cease local production along with the Commodore when Holden shuts down its manufacturing operations in 2017 and once again sources the car from Korea.

Sedan and hatch prices, and lineups, are the same. The 104kW 1.8-litre slugger (an engine that dates from the late-1990s TS Astra) five-speed manual Equipe starts at $19,890.

A six-speed auto adds $2200; the 103kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol/auto Equipe is $23,590, which also includes electric steering.

The 120kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel auto Equipe is $26,090.

CDX automatic variants add $2500 to 1.8-litre and 2.0-litre Equipe prices.

The Cruze Sportwagon, a Korean import, is priced at $24,090 for the CD 1.8-litre auto, $26,590 for the 1.8 CDX and $28,090 for the CD 2.0-litre turbodiesel auto.

Locally-built Cruze SRi and SRi-V models feature a 132kW, 1.6-litre turbopetrol engine from Opel, a six-speed manual, and Holden-calibrated sports suspension with a stiffer rear torsion beam plus a Watts link to keep it properly located.

SRi includes 17-inch alloys with 225/50 Bridgestone Potenza tyres, cuddly seats, a leather-wrapped wheel and gear lever and a body kit.

If you're after an automatic, with refinement and comfort as your priorities, the 1.4-litre Cruze is the one to test drive. There's reasonable space in the cabin, although with slightly less legroom than the Hyundai i30 and Nissan Pulsar, and a big boot.

Cruze has an attractive interior, albeit with the occasional sizzle and squeak, with a comfortable driver's seat and ample driving position adjustment. A big touch-screen connective infotainment system has internet radio and app-streaming capability.

Holden's Comfort suspension tune soaks up the bumps like a big luxury car.

If you want more serious zip, the SRi is superb value. Sure, it's not quite a pukka hot hatch like the Renault Megane or VW Golf GTi, but at just $22,890, the SRi manual is almost half the price of those cars.

The 1.6's 132kW plus a respectable 230Nm of torque at 2200rpm is certainly enough to enjoy, though by class standards the SRi's a chunky unit at nearly 1.5 tonnes and this does suck a bit of sting out of the engine.

It's an easy, well-balanced, forgiving car in corners, with accurate, passably tactile steering and suspension that's more comfortable and controlled on our rubbish roads than most imports. That's because it was tuned here, and it shows.

The manual's slicker than most and the automatic (a $2200 option) is pretty good too, with a Sport mode that's aggressively and intuitively calibrated.

Manual shifting is also provided, though without paddles.

The Cruze SRi-V, at $26,890, includes leather upholstery, a rear camera and heated front seats, plus 18-inch alloys and 235/45 Bridgestones.

These sharpen steering response further and grip like they really mean it; the quid pro quo is a more punishing ride.

The 1.4- and 1.6-litre Cruze models are competent drives, however anecdotal evidence suggests that some owners have had more than their fair share of problems, including poor quality paintwork, electrical gremlins, infotainment system issues and assorted squeaks and rattles.

In this class you can't go past the Mazda3, Toyota Corolla or Hyundai i30 for quality and reliability. VW's Golf is the best car overall, but it too has had its issues. Volkswagen claims all is well on Golf VII, but this remains to be proven.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★☆☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ SRi manual is good value
- ✔ Refined, responsive 1.4- and 1.6-litre turbopetrol engines
- ✔ Much-improved six-speed automatic
- ✔ Suspension that really works on local roads
- ✔ High-tech infotainment system as standard

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Cruze hasn't been entirely trouble-free for its owners
- ✘ 1.8 is an old engine
- ✘ It's overweight, which does hurt performance and city fuel consumption a little

SPEX (SRi manual)

- Made in Australia
- 1.6-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 132kW of power at 5500rpm/230Nm of torque at 2200rpm
- 0-100km/h in approximately 7.5 seconds
- 5.9L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 175gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Equipe includes six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, MyLink infotainment system; SRi adds sports suspension and front seats, body kit, leather-wrapped steering wheel and gear lever
- Redbook future values: 3yr 47%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Hyundai i30/Elantra, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

HOLDEN **VOLT** FROM **$59,990**



Holden's Volt has a 1.4-litre petrol engine, a big, T-shaped lithium ion battery pack and two electric motors.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

If you use petrol/electric power, by selecting Hold drive mode, the Volt has a range of up to 600km.

Holden claims a range for the Volt of up to 87km on the battery. Unlike other hybrids, the battery is not charged by the engine; it has to be plugged into a normal 240-volt powerpoint.

So the Volt gives you the best of both alternative worlds: hybrid and electric. And it really does work. The 87km electric-only range is achievable, but an average of 50km to 60km is more realistic.

You may well be able to drive it every day — to work, the shops, the school run and other short suburban trips — without ever going near a petrol station.

A solid body and big-car-style ride/handling compromise delivers secure, confident open road dynamics, albeit with plenty of understeer in tight corners, and a compliant, controlled, quiet ride.

Up front it's comfortable, spacious and sort of logical once you get the hang of the two information screens and the touch controls. Rear seat space is tight, but there's reasonable boot space.

Resale values are higher than pure electric cars like the Nissan Leaf, but lower than other hybrids, such as the Prius, and lower than conventional petrol or diesel cars.

So you will tear up 60-75 per cent of your $59,990 over three to five years of ownership.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Electric, petrol or both. Your choice
- ✔ Smooth, quiet and comfortable
- ✔ Endless amusement from the two information screens
- ✔ Solid and safe

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Questionable reliability and durability
- ✘ Interior fit and finish quality is ordinary
- ✘ Tight rear seat space

SPEX

- Made in the USA
- 1.4-litre petrol/electric plug in hybrid/continuously variable transmission/front-wheel drive
- 63kW of power at 4800rpm (engine); 111kW/370Nm of torque from 250-2800rpm (electric drive motor)
- 0-100km/h in 9.0 seconds (claimed)
- Test vehicle figures, in Hold mode: 6-7L/100km highway; 95 octane premium
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, navigation, tyre pressure monitoring, rear camera, Bluetooth with audio streaming, voice recognition, Bose audio, forward collision alert
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 38%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...

BMW i3, Nissan Leaf, Toyota Prius

HOLDEN **MALIBU** FROM **$28,890**



Holden's Malibu goes up against the Mazda6, Honda Accord, Hyundai i40, Subaru Liberty and others in the midsize sedan segment.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★★½☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

The Malibu has plenty going for it, not least aggressive pricing and generous equipment levels.

The Malibu lineup kicks off with the 2.4-litre petrol/six-speed automatic CD at $28,890. The 2.0-litre turbodiesel CD is $32,890.

CDX specification, with more gear, adds $3500 to both models.

The 2.4-litre petrol has the characteristic snappy launch feel Holden engineers into all of its cars; for a peaky, naturally-aspirated petrol four it's also got surprising midrange pulling power. Malibu is heavy, though, so acceleration is leisurely and it's not the most fuel-efficient device compared with rivals such as the Mazda6, Toyota Hybrid Camry and VW Passat.

The ride is acceptably compliant even when shod with aggressive 245/45 18 Bridgestone Potenza performance tyres. The front suspension lacks travel, though, and can give the car a whack if you hit a particularly vicious pothole.

Like most Holdens today, Malibu has more than a hint of Daewoo reincarnated in its interior design and control layout plus, on the test car, a few squeaks and chirps from the industrial-grade plastics. The rear bench is firm and flat, shaped for two.

The Mazda6 has this class shot to bits at present but you do get a lot of car for not a whole lot of money in the Holden Malibu.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Good value
- ✔ 2.4 is better than its numbers suggest
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Big enough to work well as a family car
- ✔ Huge boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Tall drivers might be cramped
- ✘ Weak brakes
- ✘ Remote-control steering
- ✘ Quality and reliability might be iffy
- ✘ Interior feels a bit like a Seoul taxi

SPEX (2.4 CD)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 123kW of power at 5800rpm/225Nm of torque at 4600rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 11.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 192gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloys, automatic air, rear camera and parking sensors, My Link touch-screen infotainment system with Bluetooth; CDX adds heated front seats, leather seat facings, 18-inch alloys, dual-zone air- and rain- sensing wipers
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...

Honda Accord, Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Nissan Altima, Toyota Camry

HOLDEN **BARINA** FROM **$12,490**



There are two distinct models in the Holden Barina range. The Barina Spark is a tiny three-door hatch priced from $12,490. It runs a 1.2-litre engine, manual only and has no pretensions to being anything other than dirt cheap transport.

The larger TM Barina (pictured) is available as a five-door hatch and a sedan with an 85kW 1.6-litre engine. The CD hatch costs $15,390 for the five-speed manual, $17,590 for the six-speed automatic and $20,090 for the CDX auto. Sedan variants add $500.

The Barina RS, with a 103kW, 1.4-litre turbopetrol engine/six-speed manual, is $21,390, or $23,590 with a six-speed auto.

Fifteen-inch alloy wheels, cruise control, Bluetooth with audio streaming, iPod connectivity and steering-wheel controls are all standard on the CD.

The Barina CDX includes iPhone connectivity, via Bluetooth, with Siri voice for hands-free calls or messaging, plus navigation, internet radio and embedded apps.

Compared with the class leaders the little Holden's old, inefficient 1.6-litre engine is lethargic, noisy and lacking torque.

Probably to compensate for the engine's sluggishness, Holden has calibrated the six-speed automatic aggressively, so shifts can be abrupt, it's frantically busy and when it kicks down you get screaming revs and not much else.

Handling, steering and ride are fine. Interior space is a fraction more generous than usual for the class.

Hyundai's Accent, the Kia Rio, Suzuki Swift and Toyota Yaris are better sorted cars than the Holden Barina, and their more modern engines use a lot less fuel.

STARS ★★☆☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★½☆☆
Performance ★★☆☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★☆☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Lots of standard equipment for your money
- ✔ More cabin space than most
- ✔ Tall drivers can get comfortable
- ✔ Reasonable ride/handling compromise

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Engine is gutless, noisy and thirsty
- ✘ Automatic is a bad match with it
- ✘ Dull, cheap, grey cabin
- ✘ Front and rear pillars restrict vision

SPEX (1.6 CD auto)
- Made in South Korea
- 1.6L four-cylinder petrol/five-speed manual/six-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 6000rpm/155Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0–100km/h N/A
- 5.3L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 161gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, cruise control, 15-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth with audio streaming, iPod connectivity, steering-wheel controls.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...
Kia Rio, Suzuki Swift, Toyota Yaris

HONDA **ACCORD EURO** FROM **$30,340**



The second-generation Accord Euro, a *Wheels* magazine Car of the Year winner (when it was launched in 2008), costs $30,340 for the base model and $37,840 for the Luxury variant.

Despite *Wheels*' COTY call, the Euro's sporty image took a hit with this model, which is a bigger, slower, softer car than the original.

The Honda engine isn't the punchiest mid-range performer. Day to day, it's perfectly adequate for most situations but at times it feels quite lethargic and unresponsive, as is often the case with Honda engines, which like to rev pretty hard.

It kicks from 5000-7000rpm, but even so it still feels like 20kW has gone missing somewhere. A six-speed manual and optional ($2300) adaptive five-speed auto are available, with the latter featuring simple Drive and Sport shift map selection.

The Honda has a secure, confident stance on the road.

The ride is compliant and comfortable on all surfaces, while the brakes offer good pedal feel and power, albeit with discs that can warp.

The driver's seat itself is a luxurious touring-style seat, which is very comfortable and supportive on a long drive.

Most of the Euro's direct rivals, including the Mazda6, VW Jetta and Hyundai i40 have more rear-seat legroom.

The Accord Euro is now one of the oldest cars in this class, where the Mazda6 is the standout leader but Honda has cut prices to keep it competitive.

There will be very few left in showrooms now, as Honda recently ended production and there wiill be no new model.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Good value for money
- ✔ Outstanding quality and reliability
- ✔ Smoothness and refinement
- ✔ High resale values
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ 2.4 lacks torque
- ✘ Has lost its sports edge
- ✘ Could use a six-speed auto
- ✘ Rear access and space are tight

SPEX (Luxury auto)
- Made in Japan
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/five-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 148kW of power at 7000rpm/234Nm of torque at 4400rpm (230Nm at 4200rpm with the auto)
- 0–100km/h in 9.7 seconds
- 6.9L/100km highway; 12.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 211gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Stability control, active front-seat head restraints, six airbags, 17-inch alloys, six-stack CD, chilled glove box and centre console box, dual-zone air, Bluetooth, USB port, automatic headlights, rain-sensing wipers, alarm
- Luxury additions include leather, sunroof, 18-inch alloys, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...
Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Suzuki Kizashi, VW Jetta

HONDA **JAZZ** FROM **$14,990**



Kicking off from $14,990 for the VTi, the latest GK-series Honda Jazz hatch brings fewer variants, lower prices and — bar one backward step — more for your money.

For example, you'll find a reversing camera, emergency-braking indicator flashes, hill-start assist, LED lighting and a central touchscreen with integrated Bluetooth phone/audio streaming (at last) and ports for 12-volt/USB/HDMI/MP4 connectivity.

That's on top of six airbags, stability control, cruise control, reach- and tilt-adjustable steering, trip computer, electric windows, remote central locking, air conditioning and 15-inch steel wheels.

Note, however, that drums now replace discs for the rear brakes — a retrograde step for usually reputable Honda.

Another $2000 buys a CVT (continuously variable transmission — replacing the previous five-speed auto gearbox) in lieu of the standard five-speed manual.

Next up is the CVT-only VTi-S from $19,790, adding fog lights, climate control, better audio, alarm, fancier cloth, electric folding mirrors, a leather-wrapped wheel, side skirts and 16-inch alloys.

Topping the range at $22,490, the VTi-L includes keyless entry and start, leather, heated front seats, centre armrest, rear parking sensors and a tailgate spoiler.

One signature Jazz exclusive dating back from 2002 remains — the rear "Magic Seats" that fold down low and flat into the cavity, usually reserved for the fuel tank in other vehicles, allowing huge floor-to-ceiling cargo space. Plus, both rear cushions hinge backwards against the backrest to provide unparalleled cross-car storage space as well.

The roomiest Jazz ever, aided by a 30mm wheelbase stretch, its tallness allows for easy entry, while thin pillars and a vast windscreen help vision all round. The instruments are bright and clear, ventilation is super effective and there's more storage ideas than in an IKEA catalogue. Is there a more user-friendly city car than the Jazz? Probably not.

The front seats, too, are fine for room and comfort, while the rear bench — though a little short on thigh support — provides extraordinarily spacious accommodation for feet, legs, knees and heads.

At the time of writing, the Jazz had not yet been crash tested by ANCAP; however, like the previous model, this one should score five stars.

A large, easy-to-load cargo area, low floor (with space-saver spare below) and one-touch Magic Seat folding mechanism further underline the Honda's unique, class-leading practicality.

On the performance front, the sweet little 1.3-litre has been parked for the 88kW/145Nm 1.5-litre single-cam i-VTEC unit that has long served the series.

Ageing perhaps, but it is a strong little unit, providing chirpy off-the-line performance that keeps on coming as speeds rise.

Mated to the responsive CVT, the whole drivetrain feels nice and smooth ... and frugal on the juice to boot, with 5.8L/100km the official average. A circa-60kg weight-loss program certainly pays dividends.

On CVT models, an "Eco Assist" function recalibrates the electronics to prioritise efficiency, while green-to-blue lighting is a reminder to be a bit more feather-footed with the throttle.

The electric power steering is a light if rather feel-free device. That said, there is a high degree of handling and roadholding finesse on offer, defined by a flat and hunkered down attitude — a corollary of the lighter yet stronger platform.

Furthermore, a concerted effort to cut noise/vibration/harshness pathways has resulted in a solidly quiet operator, backed up by a completely redesigned MacPherson strut-front and torsion beam-rear end.

The result is also a cushier ride quality, though some road-rumble intrusion remains evident.

Nevertheless, loss of rear discs aside, the latest Jazz is the best ever by some margin. Given that previous models have always featured on the front row of the class grid, it's a car you should certainly test drive before you make a decision.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★★
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Brilliant rear-seat packaging
- ✔ Standard reversing camera
- ✔ Simple Bluetooth connectivity
- ✔ Fuel efficiency
- ✔ Parking ease
- ✔ Interior versatility

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Rear brakes are now drums not discs
- ✘ Overly light and feel-free steering
- ✘ Fussier styling than before
- ✘ Some hard cabin plastics
- ✘ No digital speedo

SPEX (Honda Jazz VTi)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT auto/front-wheel drive
- 88kW of power at 6600rpm, 145Nm of torque at 4600rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.0L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO^2 emissions are 138g/km
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, reversing camera, Bluetooth phone/audio streaming, USB port, hill-start assist, cruise control, 15-inch steel wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...

Ford Fiesta, Kia Rio, Suzuki Swift, Renault Clio, Toyota Yaris, Volkswagen Polo

HONDA **CIVIC HATCH** FROM **$21,650**



Honda put the Civic hatch back into mainstream calculations in the fiercely competitive small car class with big price cuts in 2012 and specification upgrades in 2013 and 2014.

Prices start at $21,650 for the VTi-S six-speed manual; a five-speed automatic adds $2300. The VTi-L is $26,490 and the VTi-LN is $30,590.

Petrol models are powered by the latest version of Honda's 1.8-litre, naturally-aspirated, four-cylinder engine.

Its 104kW of power and 174Nm of torque are relatively modest, and there's no mid-range turbo torque, which does make you wonder why it requires 95 octane premium unleaded petrol.

Most naturally-aspirated 1.5–2.0-litre petrol engines in Japanese and Korean cars run happily on regular.

Otherwise, it's all good. The Civic is quite light and matched with the precise, close-ratio six-speed manual the engine feels more tractable than its numbers suggest.

In typical Honda fashion, it likes to rev and when the i-VTEC system opens the second set of valves it spins smoothly and willingly to a 6700rpm redline.

Although automatic stop/start is not fitted, Honda has improved the 1.8's fuel efficiency by a claimed 10 per cent.

The engine oil has a viscosity (or, rather, lack of viscosity) rating of just 0W-20 to minimise drag on mechanical components.

A 1.6-litre turbodiesel/six-speed manual is also available in the DTi-S, priced at $27,990.

The UK-built Civic hatch feels exceptionally solid and well screwed together. It lacks the sedan's independent rear suspension and has a shorter wheelbase, but it's a secure, agile handler, untroubled by rough surfaces, with precise steering and a controlled, compliant ride.

The interior features a much more contemporary design and superior materials, fit and finish quality to the dowdy, downmarket Thai-manufactured Civic sedan.

The driver sits in a snug cockpit, facing permanently illuminated instruments, with a big digital speedo positioned high, right in your line of sight.

The deep dash cowl and raked windscreen give the car a pleasant sense of space and light, but you have no idea where the front corners are located.

The test car had an unusual, and definitely non-standard, wind whistle around the driver's door at highway speeds.

The driver's seat is well bolstered and supportive.

Back-seat space is tighter than the sedan, but OK for average-sized adults. Three child-restraint anchors are on the back.

There's no oddment storage, but like the Jazz the "Magic Seats" can be folded to create a cavernous extended boot floor that's 1.6 metres long.

The 60/40 split seat base can also be folded up against the seat backs to create a deep space capable of swallowing very tall objects.

This is all made possible by the fuel tank being under the front seats instead of the rear ones.

If you're carrying passengers, the boot is still quite useful. A temporary spare is under the floor.

The Civic hatch was one of Japan's best cars in the 1980s, and this model puts it back among the front runners in the class. Compare with the Mazda3, VW's Golf and the Toyota Corolla. An update is due mid-year.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Sharp price and good resales
- ✔ Honda quality, reliability and durability
- ✔ Tidy handling and a comfortable ride
- ✔ 1.8 works nicely with slick six-speed manual
- ✔ Magic Seats are brilliant

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Premium unleaded is recommended
- ✘ Not over-endowed with back-seat legroom

SPEX (VTi-S manual)

- Made in the UK
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 104kW of power at 6500rpm/174Nm of torque at 4300rpm
- 0–100km/h N/A
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 146gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, USB, Bluetooth, cruise control with speed limiter, rear camera, hill- start assist, automatic air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Hyundai i30, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

HONDA **CIVIC** FROM **$18,490**



Honda's Civic was was once Japan's most highly credentialled small car and a class benchmark. Sadly, those days are long gone.

Hardly encouraging stuff, but at least they've taken the axe to prices, with the Civic starting at just $18,490 for the base Vi with a 104kW 1.8-litre engine (carried over from the previous model) and a five-speed manual gearbox. The five-speed auto VTi is $21,990.

The VTi-S automatic is $23,290 while the VTi-L is $26,290.

The similarly recycled 114kW 2.0-litre/five-speed auto Sport (which, err, isn't) costs $30,290.

The 1.5-litre petrol/electric/CVT Hybrid is $33,990.

The 1.8-litre engine is still acceptably frugal and efficient by current standards. It's not loaded with torque or power, but Honda's variable valve operation system (VTEC) gives it reasonable flexibility and around town it does the job in a relaxed and refined fashion.

There's no auto stop/start or other high-tech eco widgets here, though; just an Eco mode button which cuts power and sees the auto go for the high gears as quickly as possible.

The 1.8-litre, five-speed auto drivetrain in this model has lost half a star in the *Green Vehicle Guide* due to a worse air pollution rating compared with its predecessor, even though it uses less fuel.

The five-speed also has an utterly pointless Sport mode, plus shift paddles. For some bizarre reason, it kicks down too early and too often when you touch the brake pedal.

The Civic is built for comfort, not speed, so dynamics are secure and composed rather than sporty. It's well planted, with a big car feel on rough roads and accurate, light electric power steering.

While the cabin is spacious and comfortable, there's plenty of evidence of costs being taken out rather than quality being put in. The dash plastics are hard and, on some control fascias, coarse to the touch. Fit and finish are not up to Honda's once benchmark standards either.

Compare the sedan with the Civic hatch interior and the differences in materials, fit and finish quality are glaring. The hatch is made in the UK, while the sedan comes from Thailand.

That said, the control layout is efficient and simple, while the futuristic digital instruments are a brilliant piece of design, with superb clarity that requires only the briefest of glances to find out what you need to know. old-world velour upholstery is something you don't see much of today.

The generously padded driver's seat is made for wide people, so those of normal stature will lack proper support.

Vision is clear around the car, though the high rear deck really necessitates the fitting of a camera for both safety and easy parking.

The comfortable back seats are a lot higher than the front's, so kids will like the Civic. Access is good and legroom is fine for most adults.

There's a big boot with a 60/40 split-fold rear-seat back but no hooks or net. A temporary spare is under the floor.

The base-model Civic VTi is competitive in this class, with a low starting price, excellent resale values, good road manners and big, comfortable interior.

So it's a pity the impression you get when you jump in the car is that you have been short-changed by Honda's obvious cost-cutting in the cabin.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Cheap price for the VTi
- ✔ 1.8 is tractable and economical
- ✔ Comfortable, quiet ride
- ✔ Clear, informative instruments
- ✔ Spacious, open cabin
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Cheap, tacky dash plastics
- ✘ B-grade fit and finish quality
- ✘ Five-speed auto is now off the pace
- ✘ Sport is overpriced
- ✘ Needs a rear camera

SPEX (VTi auto)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/five-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 104kW of power at 6300rpm/174Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.3L/100km highway; 9.1L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO^2 emissions are 158gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, reversing camera, 15-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, USB, leather-wrapped steering wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...

Hyundai Elantra, Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla

HONDA **ODYSSEY** FROM **$38,990**



Honda's evergreen Odyssey has long been a force in people movers, wooing families for nearly 20 years with quality seven-seater accommodation and refined car-like characteristics. Not one to mess with success, the latest version aims to retain these virtues while stepping up in a number of key areas.

Priced from a sharp $38,990, the base VTi includes dual-zone climate control, cruise control, hill-start assist, 17-inch alloys and six airbags for a five-star ANCAP crash-test rating. The more generously-equipped but mechanically identical VTi-L is $47,620.

Brandishing van-like electric sliding doors and a high roof for ultra-easy entry, the Odyssey's floor is lower than usual, with an extended wheelbase and wheels-at-each-corner stance. The result is outstanding interior space, with high-set, eight-person seating in the VTi or a seven-person arrangement in the plusher VTi-L.

The latter ditches a three-seat second-row bench for a pair of very comfortable airline-style reclinable chairs with armrests and an ottoman. Uniquely they can slide sideways and back for limousine levels of legroom.

Honda has designed the third-row for three people — though they'd have to be waif-like to all fit. With all seats in use there is a reasonable 330 litres of cargo space, or a chasm if the rear seats are folded down flat into the floor. There's no power tailgate option.

Like the previous model, Odyssey's practicality as a kid carrier is tarnished by the fact that, in the continued absence of Isofix restraint mounts, child-restraint tether straps for the VTi's second row seats are anchored in the roof rather than on the back of the seats. This compromises third-row entry and exit when restraints are fitted, makes life uncomfortable for those seated in the third row and requires constant adjustment of the straps. As a parent, this silly arrangement will drive you nuts. The VTi-L's anchors are on the back of the seats, where they should be.

Simple and elegant, the dash's finish and flair is akin to a Japanese BMW, with leather and/or vinyl contrasted by metallic trim for an upmarket look. Adding to a comfortable driving position is a console-mounted gear lever, though the stylish touch-sensitive digital climate control panel is fiddly.

Cabin walk-through access is possible thanks to no centre console. Storage isn't compromised though because of a retractable lower shelf that houses (and recharges) smartphones and beverage holders.

All new, the 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol engine loves a rev yet incorporates a wide torque band for spirited low-speed acceleration.

Driving the front wheels via an all-new continuously variable transmission (CVT), the Odyssey thus feels lively across the spectrum, although the auto's propensity to have the engine roaring under heavy throttle can make it seem lethargic.

Aided by an unobtrusive stop-start system, fuel consumption is excellent, averaging around 8.2L/100km. Not bad for a boxy 1819kg wagon. Also at odds with its Honda's homely styling is the sharp and responsive steering, which complements the Odyssey's decent handling capabilities.

However, the space-saving torsion-beam rear suspension (replacing the double wishbone arrangement in earlier models) can feel busy and noisy over bumpier roads.

Generally, though, the Odyssey is a quiet and accomplished cruiser with a level of refinement a step above the often more-compromised seven-seater SUV alternatives.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Proper space for seven/eight adults
- ✔ Refined, strong drivetrain
- ✔ Modern, appealing interior
- ✔ Sliding side doors
- ✔ Honda quality
- ✔ Rock-solid resale

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Illogical and inconvenient row-two child restraint anchor location in VTi
- ✘ Fiddly climate control adjustment
- ✘ CVT flares under hard acceleration
- ✘ Some road noise and suspension thump
- ✘ Low floor can result in doors scraping gutters

SPEX

- Made in Japan
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT auto/front-wheel drive
- 129kW of power at 6200rpm/225Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.6L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 178g/km
- Warranty: three-years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, eight seats, 17-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone air, Bluetooth; VTi-L adds leather, heated and electrically adjustable front seats, sunroof, two-person second-row seating, rear air, sunblinds, active headlights, surround-view camera, lane-departure and blind-spot warnings with rear cross-traffic alert
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 45%

compare with...

Citroën Grand Picasso, Hyundai iMax, Kia Grand Carnival, VW Multivan

HONDA **CR-Z** FROM **$38,490**



Honda claims a couple of "firsts" for its CR-Z hybrid coupe. It offers a six-speed manual gearbox as standard, the first application of a manual in a hybrid. Honda also says that the CR-Z is the first hybrid that delivers genuinely sporty performance. That depends upon your definition of sporty.

The CR-Z starts at $38,490 for the manual. A continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission version is $40,790.

The CR-Z uses a similar hybrid system to the Insight, with a larger, more powerful 1.5-litre petrol engine operating in parallel with a small electric motor with a lithium-ion battery.

In Sport mode, the CR-Z is actually fun to drive and, yes, you could even call it sporty... ish. The caveat is that this applies only to the manual transmission model; the CVT isn't sporty at all because, well, CVT transmissions just don't work that way.

The CR-Z, assisted by its automatic stop/start feature, averaged around 6L/100km in town running on regular unleaded; on the highway the figure was pretty much the same.

It handles with agility and poise and the electric power steering is sharp and tactile.

There's plenty of room up front but the back seats are useless for people with legs.

The CR-Z manual is beautifully built in Japan and an engaging, entertaining drive, but it's also wildly overpriced.

Try a Ford Fiesta ST, Hyundai Veloster, Kia Koup, Renault Clio RS200, or VW Polo GTi before you sign up. They're all much cheaper, and better to drive, too.

If you want Japan's best budget sportscar, then the Toyota 86/Subaru BRZ deliver the goods for similar money.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

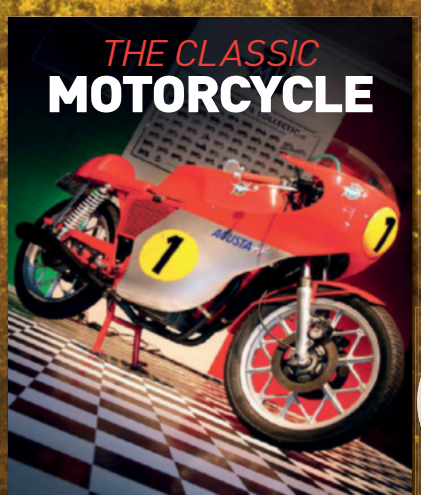
THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Yes, it is a little bit sporty
- ✔ And frugal
- ✔ Runs on regular unleaded
- ✔ Sharp, competent handling
- ✔ Made-in-Japan quality

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Way too expensive
- ✘ CVT is dull
- ✘ Useless back seat
- ✘ Compromised rear vision
- ✘ No standard reversing camera

SPEX (manual)
- Made in Japan
- 1.5-litre petrol/100-watt electric motor/six-speed manual or CVT/front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power at 6000rpm/190Nm of torque (172Nm in CVT) from 1000-1500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.7 seconds (claimed)
- 4.7L/100km highway; 6.4L/100km city, 91 octane unleaded; CO^2 emissions are 124gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, leather front seat upholstery, rear parking sensors, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, alarm, 17-inch alloys, navigation and a glass roof
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...
Ford Fiesta ST, Hyundai Veloster, Kia Koup, Toyota 86, VW PoloGTi

HOLD ON TO
THE CLASSICS.







NEW!



ONLY $19.95

Order now at universalshop.com.au or call 1300 303 414

HONDA **ACCORD** FROM **$31,490**



Honda's Accord range opens with the 129kW 2.4-litre petrol/five-speed automatic VTi, priced at $31,490.

VTi-S specification is $33,990 and VTi-L, as tested here, is $41,490.

The 206kW 3.5-litre V6/six-speed automatic Accord V6L costs $51,990.

The Accord's 2.4/five-speed auto is the same combination used in the CRV, though here the engine produces 129kW; in the CRV it's good for 140kW.

The Accord could use the extra power, because although Honda has dialled in a sprightly launch feel, the 2.4 is an otherwise dull engine that shows its age in its lack of sparkle, tractability and refinement.

It's also pretty thirsty in real-world driving, especially compared with the 2.5-litre engine in the Mazda6.

Sport mode in the five-speed auto tries gamely to extract some enthusiasm; Eco mode is also provided, but there's no auto stop/start.

Top-quality Michelin Pilot Sport tyres (235/45 18) on the VTi-L contribute significantly to respectable dynamics, but the Honda is a long way from sporty and its suspension is engineered with little finesse.

The ride can be harsh on rough surfaces, where the low-profile rubber can cause some body shake.

The electric steering is over-assisted, imprecise and devoid of feel.

A simple, stylish, conservative interior feels like $30,000 worth, not $45,000.

VTi-L's armchair-style power-adjustable driver's seat has a short, unsupportive cushion. When you lock the car, it slides back so it's easy to get in when you return, however you have to push your chosen memory setting button to then get it to go back to its correct position.

The test VTi-L was also fitted with a suite of driver-assistance systems that added $3500 to the car's price.

Lane keeping is effective and the Lane Watch system, wide-angle camera in the passenger side mirror, activated when you indicate left with the image presented on a large central screen, is a brilliant idea. However, the test car's radar-controlled, automatic emergency braking system was unpredictable and at times far too aggressive, especially when operating with the cruise control. I turned it off because in heavy traffic, its sudden, heavy braking of the car could have been hazardous.

Unfortunately, the cruise control will not operate without the radar system.

The Accord does have a once-popular feature that you just don't get in many new cars these days: an ashtray! It even has a lighter. And there's another ashtray in each of the rear doors — so everybody can light up and have fun...

Rear-seat space is fine for adults; the seat is comfortable and the low windowsills add to the sense of space and light, so kids will be happy in the Honda.

The boot is quite small, with only a porthole to extend its capacity. A full-size spare on an alloy wheel is under the floor.

Honda used to be Japan's BMW, an engineering-driven, innovative manufacturer of interesting, expressive, enjoyable cars. That was in the 1980s and 1990s; today its atrophied model range reflects a lack of talent, money and vision.

The Accord typifies Honda's corporate decline. It's a lowest-common-denominator car, built down to a price.

This is reflected in its four-star ANCAP crash-test result; a new Honda should surely be a five-star car.

The Accord VTi-L is poor value against most competitors, particularly the Mazda6, Hyundai i40, Holden Malibu, Nissan Altima, Toyota Camry Hybrid and VW Jetta/Passat.

STARS ★★☆☆☆

Safety
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★½☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★☆☆☆
Overall
★★☆☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Spacious cabin
- ✔ Quality tyres
- ✔ Honda reliability
- ✔ Full-size spare
- ✔ Lane Watch system

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ Drivetrain is off the pace
- ✘ Awful steering
- ✘ Choppy ride on rough roads
- ✘ Automated braking system needs work
- ✘ Three ashtrays and a lighter? In 2014?
- ✘ Four-star ANCAP result? In 2014?

SPEX

- Made in Thailand
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/five-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 129kW of power at 6200rpm/225Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.2 seconds
- 6.1L/100km highway; 11.6L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 192gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, rear camera, 16-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth; VTi-S adds Lane Watch, parking sensors and 17-inch alloys; VTi-L adds a sunroof, 18-inch alloys, navigation and active cornering headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Holden Malibu, Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Toyota Camry Hybrid

HONDA **CRV** FROM **$27,490**



The CRV range starts with the 2.0-litre six-speed manual front-wheel-drive VTi, at $27,490. The five-speed automatic is $29,790 and the VTi Navi is $31,790.

The 2.4-litre, five-speed automatic, all-wheel-drive VTi is $32,790, the VTi-S is $36,290 and the VTi-L, as tested, is $42,290.

A 2.2-litre turbodiesel all-wheel-drive DTi-S model costs $38,290 with a six-speed manual or $40,590 with a five-speed automatic; in DTi-L specification, it's $45,340.

The 2.4-litre is one of the most powerful engines in this class, but as is often the case with Honda engines, it doesn't feel like it's got as much power as the specification says it has. This is probably because the full 140kW kicks in only at 7000rpm, where the engine is screaming its head off.

If the concept of torque is foreign to you, you're probably not going to get an understanding of it here either. Econ mode slows things right down and the automatic is reluctant to budge from the higher gears. Normal and Sport modes are better, with a more responsive accelerator, a busier transmission and reasonable progress.

However, compared with the six-speed automatic and CVT transmissions on rivals such as Subaru Forester, Mitsubishi Outlander and Mazda CX5, plus the availability of automatic stop/start and other new technologies, the CRV's 2.4-litre drivetrain is inefficient and unrefined.

The CRV's suspension strikes a fair balance between handling and ride. The light, sharp electromechanical power steering is quite vague at freeway speeds and a touch wandery.

The ride can be firm and fidgety around town; on the open road, though, it's fine and impacts are effectively isolated from the body. Brakes are average.

In the top-spec VTi-L tested, the design and quality of the cabin, particularly the dash, have taken a big step backwards from the previous model. I actually thought I was climbing into a base-specification CRV, not the top-of-the-line variant, and certainly not a car with a $40K-plus price tag.

Although there's nothing wrong with the way it's screwed together, dull, hard, grey plastics everywhere, and a boring, industrial-grade design create a cheap and nasty impression. This is a common trait on Hondas sourced from Thailand.

Honda has now made its driver assistance package available as a $3500 option on VTi-L. It includes automatic emergency braking, lane keeping and radar cruise control.

There's lots of driver's seat travel and ample wheel reach adjustment as well. A camera is standard, plus seatbelt indicators for all back-seat positions. CRV has one of the most spacious back seats in this class, however the two-top child-restraint tether points are in the roof. A convex mirror in the driver's sunglasses holder allows you to check on the kids from the driver's seat.

Like the back seat, CRV scores big points in the boot. The low floor is very easy to load and also creates a big overall load space.

Levers release either side of the 60/40 split-fold rear seat, which then folds neatly to create an extended, but not quite flat, floor.

There is better value and more contemporary technology elsewhere, notably in Hyundai's Santa Fe or smaller ix35, Mazda's CX5, Nissan's XTrail and Subaru's Forester.

An update is due shortly, with a more powerful turbodiesel, nine-speed automatic and new front and rear styling.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Spacious, practical, comfortable interior
- ✔ Tidy handling, especially on rough roads
- ✔ Good ride comfort here too
- ✔ Full-size spare
- ✔ Honda's engineering is pretty bulletproof

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Engine/transmission is old technology and feels like it. Thirsty, too
- ✘ Downmarket dash design and materials
- ✘ Child restraint tethers in the roof
- ✘ Ride's a bit jiggly around town

SPEX (VTi-S auto)

- Made in Thailand
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/five-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 7000rpm/222Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 8.7L/100km highway; 12.0L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO^2 emissions are 201gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloys, camera, Bluetooth, USB and alarm and roof rails; VTi-S adds automatic headlights, dual-zone air, navigation, rear-parking sensors and a leather-wrapped wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Mazda CX5, Nissan XTrail, Subaru Forester

HSV **CLUBSPORT** FROM **$59,990**



CARS OF THE YEAR WINNER

HSV's Gen-F 325kW 6.2-litre six-speed manual Clubsport sedan is priced at $61,990. A six-speed auto, with paddle shifters for 2015, adds $2500.

The Clubsport R8, with the V8 tuned for 340kW, plus leather upholstery, 20-inch alloys and Bose audio is $73,290/$75,790. The R8 Tourer, with the auto as standard, costs $76,490.

Maloo is $59,990 and Maloo R8 is $69,990.

The "SV Enhanced" option is now standard on R8 models, while the bi-modal exhaust, with an electonically operated loud pedal, is also standard acorss the HSV range for 2015.

The 6.2-litre LS3 V8 rumbles away gently and quietly on light throttle applications, steadily gathering steam to about 3000rpm, from where the exhaust opens its pipes to high-flow mode and you get a lovely rich noise plus a harder, meaner edge to the delivery, which continues through to 6500rpm or so. Holden (and HSV) still don't put an indicated redline on the tacho, which is silly.

Launch control is fitted to the manual, which remains a relatively heavy, slow shifting box, however it's also positive and precise while the clutch is surprisingly light and progressive in its takeup.

Tour/Sport/Performance settings, adjustable via a dial on the centre console, have no effect on performance or dynamics (only the Senator and GTS get adjustable magnetic dampers), however it does vary the stability control intervention threshold, so you can have a bit of tail out fun on the track, and the weighting of the electric power steering.

In Sport and Performance, this is one of the best EPS systems around and a big improvement on the old, inconsistently weighted hydraulic system.

It adds to the remarkably light, agile, responsive feel — now imbued in the Clubsport — which complements the clear, informative feedback you get from each corner and makes the car very easy, relaxed and confidence-inspiring at speed.

The 255/35 (front) and 275/35 (rear) Continentals offer great grip and are also very quiet.

The only blot on the test car's dynamic package was slightly spongy, unresponsive brakes, but this could be due to the hard life a press car has to endure, including a lot of track work. A Maloo tested the following week, with the same brake package, was fine.

The Gen-F HSV also offers a more compliant, comfortable ride than its predecessors. It can be a tad sharp in the rough, but considering the aggressive chassis specification, it's forgiving.

Add a big, luxurious GT-style armchair upholstered in leather, a full-house infotainment system, Bose audio and an array of driver-friendly tech such as a head-up display, blind spot warning lights in the side mirrors, lane departure alert and an admittedly overexcitable collision warning system and you have a wonderful car in which to carve out big distances with absolutely zero effort.

Beyond its enduring bang-for-your-bucks, value-for-money appeal, the changes Holden made to VF Commodore — especially the new interior, infotainment systems, steering, handling and braking — also lifted HSV's Clubsport to the point where it is now much more sophisticated, refined and luxurious than previous models. That said, it's still proudly bogan, one of the world's great muscle cars and the R8 in particular is a dead set bargain.

Needless to say that after 2017, when Commodore production ceases, HSVs will become eminently collectable.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★½
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★★
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Killer value
- ✔ Soulful, muscular V8
- ✔ Confident, responsive, secure handling
- ✔ Great steering
- ✔ Comfortable, spacious and refined

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Quality and reliability can be iffy
- ✘ Thick front pillars block vision
- ✘ VERY LOUD warning chimes for rear parking assist
- ✘ Oversensitive collision warning system
- ✘ Optional spare

SPEX (R8)

- Made in Australia
- 6.2L V8 petrol/six-speed manual/rear-wheel drive
- 340kW of power at 6000rpm; 570Nm of torque at 4600rpm
- 0-100km/h in approx five seconds
- 9.1L/100km highway; 18.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 300gkm (figures for 325kW R8)
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: R8 includes stability control, six airbags, leather upholstery, 20-inch alloy wheels, automatic parking, Bose audio, Bluetooth, voice activation, navigation, collision, blind spot and lane departure warnings, head-up display, rain-sensing wipers, data logging
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 46%

compare with...

Chrysler 300 SRT8, Falcon XR8

HSV **GEN-F GTS** FROM **$94,490**



HSV's current Gen-F GTS sedan could, and probably should, ink the history books as Australia's greatest performance car, period. The outrageous 430kW of power and 740Nm of torque generated by its supercharged "LSA" 6.2-litre V8 is a huge leap above and beyond any other local product, past or present.

These outputs are comparable with other world supersports sedan benchmarks such as the BMW M5, Mercedes-Benz AMG E63 S and Porsche Panamera Turbo GT, which command up to $400,000.

The HSV GTS, however, costs just $94,490 in six-speed manual form. The six-speed auto variant is $96,990.

And if you want the world's ultimate performance ute, the GTS Maloo is also available, priced at $87,990.

The GTS's greatness isn't merely engine specific. It's underpinned with solid Holden VF Commodore DNA, treated to the most comprehensive powertrain, handling and braking enhancement program of any Australian muscle car to date, and delivers staggering real world numbers — numbers that HSV is reluctant to claim, but which I can personally verify as 4.6 seconds for the 0-100km/h sprint and just 12.6 seconds for the 0-400 metre dash. For the record, that's in the automatic version, which lacks the manual variant's tricky electronic launch control. Again, that's on pace with the Germans and a new benchmark for the local performance sedan record books.

Beyond its fearsome numbers and bargain price, though, what really impresses about the GTS is its completeness. Take, for example, the handling package. Only the more affordable, naturally aspirated Clubsport stablemate has such a well-sorted combination of poise, precision and balance through a corner at racetrack pace.

That the flagship model can convert its more Herculean outputs into quicker-than-Clubsport lap times is as miraculous as it is marvellous. The complex rear-end hardware required to get all that performance effectively to the road is almost a straight lift from the Chevrolet Corvette ZL1, while the brakes feature forged aluminium calipers and 20 pistons clamping the discs.

Nor is the GTS a cantankerous, fire-breathing widow-maker. It's as docile as any family car at a cruise — the auto slick and smooth-shifting, the adaptive electromagnetic dampers providing refined ride "comfort" mode — its heroic exhaust note tempered to a hum when the right foot treads lightly. The GTS can be as pleasant as it can be potent.

However, it takes a *very* delicate touch to get anywhere near its already significant 15.5L/100km fuel consumption claim. Its thirst is startling when exercising the extent of its formidable abilities.

So where's the differentiation that sees comparably quick German halo cars command well over twice the price?

For a start, the HSV struggles to distance itself from its humble Commodore roots. It certainly boasts a long features list, though much of its equipment lacks integration, feels added-on or aftermarket, particularly inside the cabin.

The workmanship is workmanlike, the fit and finish adequate rather than precise, the sense of prestige suggested rather than truly felt or observed under close inspection.

That said, there's certainly nothing low-rent or poor quality about the local hero. In fact, it's the depth and refinement that goes a long way to anchoring its greatness. It's simply built to a price, and that's a fiscal reality rather than a criticism. Not only is it a worthy go-fast alternative to big-dollar imports, its unique Australian character offers huge appeal.

The GTS now looks like a gold-plated future collectible in the fading twilight of local car manufacturing.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★☆☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Heroic engine and mechanical package
- ✔ Euro-busting performance
- ✔ Real-world drivability
- ✔ Collectability
- ✔ Bang for your dollar value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Humble Commodore roots well evident
- ✘ Fussy interior design
- ✘ Ferocious thirst
- ✘ Same restricted vision issues as VF

SPEX

- Made in Australia
- 6.2-litre supercharged V8/six-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 430kW of power at 5900rpm/740Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.6 seconds
- 11.8L/100km highway; 22.3L/100km city, 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 373gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 20-inch alloy wheels with 255/30 front and 275/35 rear tyres, alarm, automatic parking, collision alert, blind spot information, lane departure warning, smartphone connectivity, navigation, head-up display, Bluetooth, heated sports seats, partial leather upholstery.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

compare with...

BMW M5, Jaguar XFR-S, Mercedes E63 AMG

HYUNDAI **i30** FROM **$19,990**



The previous i30 put Hyundai on the map in Australia. The brand had been renowned for offering a long-standard equipment list for a low price, but the 2007-2012 i30 added solid, quality engineering plus excellent reliability and durability to the deal.

This is the most competitive class in the market today, with some outstanding cars being offered at super-sharp prices, including the Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, Holden Cruze, Nissan Pulsar, Honda Civic and VW Golf.

The i30 five-door hatchback range opens with the 1.8-litre petrol/six-speed manual Active, at $20,990; a six-speed auto adds $2250. The Elite, tested here, is $24,590 and the Premium, with the auto as standard, is $30,490.

A locally-developed SR model, with sports suspension, 17-inch alloys and a 129kW 2.0-litre petrol engine, is $27,990 with a six-speed manual or $30,240 with a six-speed automatic.

The 1.6-litre turbodiesel/six-speed manual Active is $23,590; again, the auto adds $2500. The Elite is $27,190 and the Premium is $33,090.

The 1.8-litre petrol four lacks torque and is gutless below 4000rpm or so. Around town, it's not a major issue and with six speeds in both transmissions the gaps between ratios aren't too wide.

However, it's a different story on the open road, where you have to plan overtaking manoeuvres well in advance and it has no hope of holding the set cruise-control speed on a decent hill.

The cruise control also lets the car's speed increase on a descent, rather than maintaining it, which is potentially expensive if there's a speed camera or highway patrol car lurking about.

The i30 Tourer wagon runs a newer 1.6-litre direct injection petrol engine.

The Tourer Active costs $24,990, or $27,240 with the auto.

The Tourer is also available with the 1.6-litre turbodiesel, priced from $27,590, with the top spec Elite turbodiesel auto coming in at $33,440.

The i30's handling is fine until you start to push it, at which point it becomes unbalanced, with excessive roll, in part caused by steering that's slightly too responsive on initial turn in and offers no feel whatsoever on any of its three adjustable settings.

The ride is firm yet compliant, while the brakes have ample power, albeit with a touchy pedal in the test car.

As is usual with Hyundai, you get lots of equipment for your money, especially in Elite specification, where you get a big touch screen, with fast, easy-to-use navigation, SUNA traffic updates, a rear camera, keyless entry and starting, heated front seats, 16-inch alloys, sunvisor extensions, rain-sensing wipers, a full-size spare and a stylish, high-quality interior.

The Hyundai value for money story adds excellent quality and reliability, a five years/unlimited kilometres warranty and low running costs.

The well-bolstered driver's seat is one of the most comfortable and supportive in the class, and there's plenty of seat and steering wheel adjustment.

Rear seat space is sufficient for average-sized adults, while the deep boot has a 12-volt outlet, two bag hooks and 60/40 extendability, with a step in the extended floor.

If you're looking for maximum car for minimum money, the choice comes down to the i30, Mitsubishi Lancer, Nissan Pulsar or Toyota Corolla.

Regularly advertised drive-away deals around the $20K mark are the way to go in this class, so check www.carsales.com.au for current offers.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ Stylish, high-quality interior
- ✔ Excellent quality, durability and reliability
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat and driving position
- ✔ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ The 1.8 is pretty gutless below 4000rpm
- ✘ Cruise control doesn't work properly
- ✘ So-so open road dynamics
- ✘ Three mode steering is a gimmick

SPEX (Elite manual)

- Made in Korea
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6500rpm/178Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.1L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 156gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard (Active): Seven airbags, stability control, 16-inch steel wheels, Bluetooth with audio streaming, touch-screen audio, USB, chilled glovebox, full-size spare.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Honda Civic, Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Nissan Pulsar, Toyota Corolla

What are your wheels worth?

Find out online now

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY

HYUNDAI **i40** FROM **$31,990**



Hyundai's i40 Tourer wagon range includes a 1.7-litre turbodiesel, priced at $36,590 in Active spec with a six-speed automatic. The six-speed manual is $34,590.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★½☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

It's neither fast nor especially refined, but it slugs away without ever feeling strained and the manual averages an exceptionally frugal 4.7 litres per 100 kilometres.

A 130kW 2.0-litre direct-injection petrol i40 2.0GDi Tourer starts at $31,990 in Active specification.

The i40 is bigger inside than it looks, with plenty of back-seat and boot space plus a low, easy-load, 60/40 extendable floor.

When you're buying a kid carrier, it's the details that count. The child-restraint anchors are in a dumb place, in the load floor instead of on the back of the rear seat, but you get nine airbags (and five-star NCAP), storage compartments and bottleholders everywhere, a durable, high-quality cabin, net and load cover in the boot, seatbelt indicators for all positions, parking sensors at both ends and Bluetooth with audio streaming. Hyundai also provides a full-size spare.

The mid-spec Elite (1.7CRDi $41,590; 2.0 GDi $38,990) includes a useful track/sliding anchor load-securing system. The Premium ($47,590 or $44,990 for the 2.0GDi) gets all the options, including a power tailgate.

The i40 sedan is priced at $2000 less than the Tourer.

If you've got a couple of kids and you're looking for a sharply-priced, stylish, well-made, no-grief sedan or wagon, the i40 is worth a test drive.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Good value family wagon
- ✔ Plenty of back seat and boot space, with easy access
- ✔ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✔ A smooth ride and tidy handling
- ✔ Long warranty and low ownership costs

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Reversing camera should be standard on Active
- ✘ The diesel isn't particularly quick, smooth or quiet
- ✘ Child-restraint anchors in wagon boot floor
- ✘ On sloping ground, rear doors won't stay open on intermediate detents

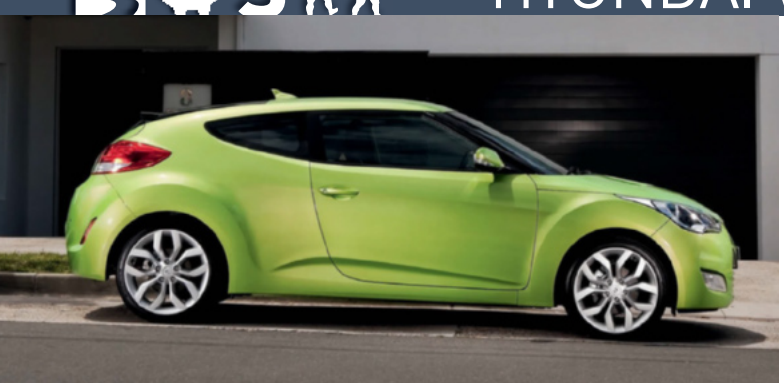
SPEX (1.7 CRDI Active auto)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.7-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power at 4000rpm/320Nm of torque from 2000-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 12.0 seconds (claimed)
- 4.8L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 149gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, nine airbags, automatic headlights, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, 16-inch alloys, front and rear parking sensors, full-size spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Holden Sportwagon, Mazda6, Subaru Liberty, VW Passat

HYUNDAI **VELOSTER** FROM **$24,490**



Hyundai's Veloster isn't the first car with two doors on one side and one on the other. Mini tried it with the Clubman. They sold, oh, not very many at all, so it's safe to assume it's an idea that's not going to catch on.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety (Euro NCAP) ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

The base model, with a 103kW atmo 1.6 petrol/six-speed manual, costs $24,490. The Veloster+ is $29,490 and the SR Turbo is $32,990.

The turbocharged 1.6 produces 150kW at 6000rpm and 265Nm from 1750-4500rpm. That's slightly below Euro hot hatch ballpark numbers today, but it's certainly enough, and the engine has a lovely smooth turbo rush that comes on strong from about 2000rpm.

The SR Turbo handles fine, and it's steering is sharper, meatier and more tactile than the standard model, but it's not going to cause a Golf GTi, Focus ST or Renault Megane RS265 any problems.

The weird door arrangement actually makes sense, especially with the rear door being on the kerb side so passengers can safely and easily get into the back seat without having to tilt/slide a front seat forward.

Once in there, the back seat's surprisingly spacious.

The sports-styled driver's seat is a beauty; well-bolstered, supportive and with enough adjustability to get comfortable.

All versions of the Veloster are good value for money, high-quality, polished machines and the real deal on the road.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Door arrangement isn't as silly as it seems
- ✔ Sweet, responsive 1.6 with well-matched transmissions
- ✔ Taut, agile handling, sharp steering and good grip
- ✔ Good value for money
- ✔ Loaded with gear

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Limited rear-seat headroom and you have to duck to get in the back
- ✘ The manual isn't exactly a rifle-bolt action shifter
- ✘ Resale values aren't great

SPEX (base automatic)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual or automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 6300rpm/166Nm of torque at 4850rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.5 seconds
- 5.2L/100km highway; 8.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 151gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, active front-seat head restraints, 18-inch alloys, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, reversing camera, tyre pressure monitoring, rear parking sensors, keyless entry and starting
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Holden Cruze SRi, Honda CR-Z, Kia Rio SLS, Kia Koup, VW Polo GTi

HYUNDAI **SANTA FE** FROM **$38,490**



The Hyundai Santa Fe features seven seats in all models.

The 2015 lineup opens with the front-wheel-drive 141kW 2.4-litre direct-injection four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual Active at $38,490. The six-speed auto is $40,990.

The 145kW 2.2-litre turbodiesel/six-speed manual Active is $41,490. A six-speed auto adds $2500.

The Elite 2.2 turbodiesel automatic is $48,490 and the Highlander is $53,240.

The 2.2 turbodiesel produces strong numbers for its size: 145kW of power at 3800rpm and 436Nm from 1800-2500rpm, or 421Nm with the manual.

The same engine is also used in the Santa Fe's twin under the skin, the Kia Sorento. Its numbers are far superior to any Japanese rival. Toyota's 3.0-litre turbodiesel in the LandCruiser Prado, for example, produces less power, less torque, and uses more fuel.

It's also a stronger performer across most of the rev range, and much more fuel efficient, than the 2.7-litre V6 turbodiesel in the Ford Territory.

The Hyundai pulls easily from low revs, is exceptionally smooth and strong in the midrange and pulls hard across the top end to well past 4500rpm, almost like a sporty 2.0-litre petrol engine.

The manual's action is fine and the gearing is appropriate, but the automatic is a more efficient match with the engine and you can just relax and let it do the work for you.

Hyundai claims the suspension has been tuned for Australian road conditions, but if this is the case the engineers who tuned it were driving on some atypical Australian roads ie, smooth ones.

The Santa Fe does pack some very sophisticated chassis technology, including torque vectoring and steering assistance in the stability control system.

Highlander specification also includes lane departure warning and automatic reverse parking.

The Santa Fe has no serious vices and handling is passable for a family truck, but it feels like a not-quite-there attempt to replicate the Mercedes M-Class.

Body control isn't great, there's a lot of roll at the rear and the plot gets rather floaty and unsettled on bumpy roads.

Hyundai's three-mode selectable electric steering, on any setting, offers little feedback.

Hyundai claims to have addressed these suspension and steering issues on the 2015 model, which we're yet to drive.

If it has now been sorted, then the Santa Fe should be a class leader. A "sporty" SR variant is due in early 2015.

The cabin is bright, open, spacious and very well finished.

The middle row is split 60/40 and has plenty of legroom.

It's wide enough for three on short trips and three restraint anchors are on the back.

The two individual row-three seats, which form the load floor when not required, are easily raised into position, but the second-row seat folding arrangement is clumsy, strenuous and rear-seat access is difficult.

In five-seat mode the floor is long, low and easy to load via the roof-hinged tailgate, which is power-operated on Elite and Highlander.

A full-size spare on an alloy wheel is included, as is life of vehicle capped price servicing.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety (Euro NCAP)
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The 2.2 turbodiesel is the best engine in this class
- ✔ Plenty of space
- ✔ Loaded with equipment
- ✔ Excellent quality
- ✔ Long warranty and strong resales

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Lots of body roll in corners and it gets unsettled on a rough road.
- ✘ Clumsy, difficult access to the back seats
- ✘ Kia Sorento is more stylish and handles better
- ✘ Remote control steering

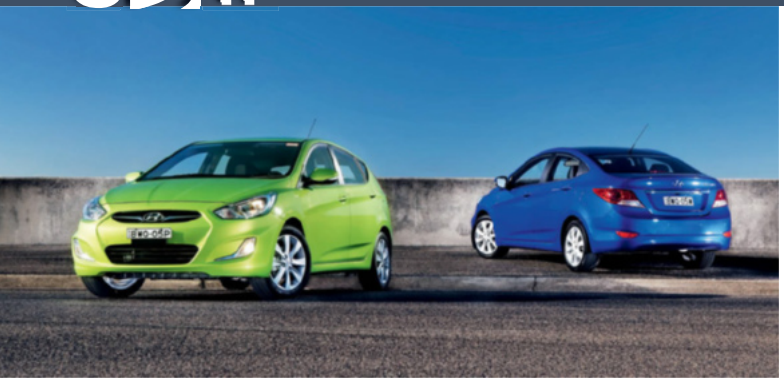
SPEX (Elite auto)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed manual/six-speed automatic/on-demand all-wheel-drive
- 145kW of power at 3800rpm/436Nm of torque from 1800-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10 seconds
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.9L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 192gkm
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, active front head restraints, 18-inch alloys, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, rear camera, rear park assist, leather-wrapped wheel, chilled glovebox, touch-screen navigation, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 45%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Holden Captiva, Kia Sorento, Nissan Pathfinder

HYUNDAI **ACCENT** FROM **$16,990**



Hyundai's Accent is cleverly designed to offer generous interior space in a compact body and comes as a sedan or hatchback.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

Accent prices start at $16,990 for the base 91kW 1.6-litre port injection petrol Active sedan or hatch.

The 103kW direct-injection 1.6-litre petrol Accent SR hatch is $18,990. Elite hatch and sedan, with the 91kW engine, both cost $20,590.

A six-speed manual is standard in Active and a four-speed auto adds $2000. It's standard in Elite. A six-speed auto adds the same to SR.

Premium sedan and hatch, with the 103kW 1.6/six-speed auto drivetrain as standard, both cost $22,990.

The Active's 91kW 1.6-litre petrol drivetrain is effective in the city, where you have strong punch in the higher gears, a light, precise gearbox action and great fuel economy running on regular unleaded.

Rear-seat space is generous and the boot is huge.

If you're after a small outside/big inside car to use as your day-to-day city drive, the Accent is worth a look.

Hyundai's long warranty, low running costs and grief-free ownership reputation are bonuses.

Accent shares its body structure with the Kia Rio.

The Rio hatch is a more refined, sophisticated car — albeit at slightly higher prices.

The same goes for the VW Polo. Sedan rivals are the Holden Barina and Toyota Yaris; Accent is a superior drive to both.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Generous interior space for a small car
- ✔ Works beautifully as a city runabout
- ✔ 1.6 performance and fuel efficiency in town
- ✔ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✔ Full-size spare
- ✔ Good value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Doesn't work as well on the highway as it does in the city
- ✘ No cruise control or steering-wheel reach adjustment
- ✘ Remote-control steering
- ✘ Restricted rear vision in hatch

SPEX (Active manual)
- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 91kW of power at 6300rpm/156Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0–100km/h: N/A
- 4.9L/100km highway; 8.1L/100km city, 91 octane regular, CO^2 emissions are 144gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 14-inch steel wheels, iPod connectivity, Bluetooth, USB socket, air conditioning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...
Holden Barina, Honda Jazz/City, Kia Rio, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

HYUNDAI **ELANTRA** FROM **$20,990**



Hyundai's Elantra is available in three grades. The base Active is $20,990 with a six-speed manual or $23,240 with a six-speed auto,

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

Elite auto is $26,840 and the Premium auto is $30,490.

It's a super-sized small sedan with enough cabin and boot space to qualify as a bona fide kid carrier.

Factor in a five-star ANCAP score, low running costs, a five-year/unlimited kilometres warranty, full-size spare and bulletproof reliability, and the Elantra is also a typically blue chip Hyundai ownership proposition.

As a drive, though, it's not quite in the premier league, partly because it's powered by a low-cost, low-tech 1.8-litre petrol engine, with a feeble 178Nm of torque at 4700rpm. The six-speed auto does a reasonable job but it doesn't have much to work with.

Superior engines in this class for performance, refinement, emissions and fuel efficiency include Mazda3's 2.0-litre, the 1.4-litre turbo in the Cruze and Toyota's 1.8, a smooth, happy match with the CVT transmission in the Corolla, while Kia's Cerato, which shares DNA with the Elantra, has a strong, punchy 2.0-litre as well.

The Hyundai corners with surprising balance and enthusiasm, assisted by a local suspension tune that's designed to work well on our rough roads.

The Elite is the best deal in the Elantra range. Hyundai added extra gear in 2014, including navigation and a rear camera.

The Premium, despite niceties like leather, doesn't feel premium enough for the money when you compare it with a similarly-priced Cruze, Mazda3, Subaru Impreza or Toyota Corolla.

The Mazda3 and VW Golf are the pick of this class.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Big space for a small car
- ✔ Low running costs
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✔ Reasonable dynamics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ 1.8 lacks torque and is off the pace for efficiency and emissions
- ✘ Active is under-tyred
- ✘ Ride can get choppy on rough roads

SPEX (Elite auto)
- Made in South Korea
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6500tpm/178Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.7L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 169gkm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, Bluetooth, iPod connectivity, navigation, rear camera, 16-inch alloy wheels, full-size spare, cruise control
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...
Holden Cruze, Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

HYUNDAI **iX35** FROM **$26,990**



Hyundai's ix35 2.0-litre petrol front-wheel-drive Active costs $26,990 with a six-speed manual or $29,190 with a six-speed automatic, as tested.

The Elite is $33,590.

The all-wheel-drive ix35 range opens with the Elite 2.4-litre petrol/six-speed auto at $35,990.

Elite 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto and Highlander 2.4 petrol/six-speed auto are both $38,590.

Highlander 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto is $40,990.

The ix35 is the same vehicle under the skin as the Kia Sportage.

Hyundai gave the ix35 a major overhaul in late 2013, which has turned what was a pretty ordinary SUV into one of the better drives in the class, certainly at base model level.

The 122kW/205Nm 2.0-litre petrol engine works nicely in the Active, largely thanks to excellent ECU management which sees its relatively modest performance put to good use by the six-speed automatic. Direct injection improves responsiveness, refinement and efficiecy, while the lighter weight of the front-wheel drivetrain also helps here.

The 135kW/392Nm, 2.0-litre turbodiesel is a smaller version of the outstanding 2.2-litre engine used in the larger Santa Fe and the Kia Sorento. It shifts the ix35 effortlessly and there's no need to move the lever out of Drive.

The 136kW/240Nm 2.4-litre direct-injection petrol, which I have not yet driven, should have no problem shifting the all-wheel drive Elite, though given the excellent performance and dynamics of the front-wheel-drive models the value of the all-wheel drive option is now questionable.

The original ix35 was a loose, sloppy handler, especially the front-wheel drive but, stung by criticism, Hyundai Australia responded with its own local suspension and steering tuning program.

The Kia Sportage's suspension, also specifically tuned for Australian conditions, gave Hyundai an indication of what could be achieved.

The transformation has been remarkable. The front-wheel-drive Active now handles Australian roads with composure and authority. The ride is much more comfortable and the excessive steering shake and wander of the original is gone.

The steering itself is more responsive and precise, with a more direct ratio.

Like Hyundai's "fluidic sculpture" exterior styling, the dash design can seem a bit hysterical at first, but once you get over the initial shock the control layout is actually easy to use and pretty efficient.

The fairly basic and unsupportive driver's seat has plenty of travel.

The back seat offers easy access, adjustable recline, a flat cushion and plenty of space. Isofix and conventional restraint tether points are provided

Boot space is reasonably generous given the ix35's compact dimensions, with a wide floor and the ability to extend it to around 1.7 metres using the 60/40 split-fold rear seats.

Active specification includes rear parking sensors however a camera, which should be standard, is not provided.

Elite and Highlander include a camera, touch-screen navigation and alloy wheels

Pick of the much improved Hyundai ix35 Series II range would be the 2.0-litre petrol Active automatic, or the 2.0-litre turbodiesel Elite.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- Strong engines and a much improved SUV in Series II specification
- Excellent ride/handling on local roads
- Excellent quality and reliability
- Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Rear camera not included on Active
- ✘ Steering wheel doesn't adjust for reach
- ✘ Inconvenient centre-rear-seat belt operation
- ✘ It's still pretty ugly
- ✘ Brakes lack power

SPEX (2.0t/d Elite)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 4000rpm/392Nm of torque from 1800–2500rpm
- 0–100km/h: TBA
- 6.0L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city. CO^2 emissions are 189gkm
- Active includes six airbags, stability control, 17-inch steel wheels, an alarm, cruise control, touch-screen audio, Bluetooth, auxiliary and USB inputs; Elite adds 17-inch alloys, navigation, camera; Highlander includes 18-inch alloys, front- and rear-seat heating, leather upholstery inserts
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...

Kia Sportage, Mazda CX5, Subaru XV and Forester, VW Tiguan

INFINITI **Q50** FROM **$50,900**



Infiniti's Q50 is the first series production car to use steer by wire technology. Hey, if it's good enough for the Airbus A380 and Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning, you should be able to trust it. Right?

Direct Adaptive Steering (DAS) is standard in every Q50 bar the base model GT.

The Daimler-sourced 155kW/350Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel-drive 2.0t GT is $50,900; the S is $56,900 and the S Premium is $60,500.

Also from Daimler, the 125kW/400Nm 2.1-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/seven-speed auto/rear-wheel-drive 2.2d GT is priced at $51,900; the 2.2d S is $57,900 and the S Premium is $61,900.

The Q50 Hybrid runs a 3.5-litre V6 petrol/electric-motor parallel hybrid drivetrain with combined outputs of 268kW/546Nm.

It's priced at $67,900 for the rear-wheel-drive S and $73,900 for the all-wheel-drive S Premium; both run a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission.

DAS still has a conventional mechanical linkage, but it's decoupled on the column via an electric clutch and only activated if the triple ECU/steering actuator system fails. Weighting and response (effectively the ratio) are adjustable, each across three settings, via a touch-screen menu. DAS also incorporates camera-controlled lane-keeping.

It redefines precision and responsiveness, is completely free of kickback and, if you understand the difference between weight and feel, offers clear, informative feedback from the road. It complements the overall character of the Q50 Hybrid S, though the 2.0t S, which I've not yet driven, is probably the pick of the range as a drive and as a deal.

The Hybrid S is light enough (just), powerfully braked, plenty grippy and, with DAS adjusted to "Quick," more than capable of giving the bloke in the BMW 3 or 4 Series a very bad day.

The ride's lack of compliance on rough roads, a consequence of low-profile run-flat tyres, could be an issue for some.

The hybrid drivetrain offers a similarly seamless, strong, refined delivery to its closest rival — in all aspects except price — BMW's circa $100,000 ActiveHybrid 3.

At a claimed 5.1 seconds to 100km/h the Q50 is fractionally quicker than the BMW.

The 2.1-litre turbodiesel, also fitted to the Mercedes E200CDi, is no bullet (8.5 seconds to 100km/h) and the seven-speed is typically Merc-lazy in its kickdown habits, but there's abundant, effortless torque available and it's easily capable of returning fours on the highway. The oiler also feels appreciably lighter than the Hybrid.

The interior is comfortable, conservative Japan Inc, with luxurious front seating and good adjustability for the driving position. There's ample rear-seat legroom, too, but limited headroom because you're perched high. The hybrid's boot space is compromised by the battery underneath.

Q50's automatic emergency braking system, standard on S Premium, includes Back-up Collision Intervention (BCI), which can stop the car when reversing if it detects an obstacle behind you. Infiniti is loathe to tout BCI as a potential child-saving device because inattentive parents will rely on the technology to assume their responsibilities.

The Infiniti Q50 offers blue sky tech, a competitive drive and excellent value. It deserves to give the usual suspects — Audi A4/BMW 3 Series/Lexus IS/Mercedes C-Class — some long overdue competition.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Hybrid drives like a real sports sedan
- ✔ Steer by wire works
- ✔ Excellent value
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ Comfortable seats
- ✔ S Premium is loaded with safety tech

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Run-flats compromise ride comfort
- ✘ Small boot
- ✘ Uncertain resale values
- ✘ Six-month service intervals on hybrid
- ✘ Hybrid runs 98 octane premium

SPEX (HYBRID S)

- Made in Japan
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/electric hybrid/seven-speed dual-clutch automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 268kW of power/546Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 5.1 seconds
- 5.4L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 159gkm
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather-faced seats, 19-inch alloy wheels, sports suspension, navigation, Bose sound, Bluetooth with audio streaming and smartphone connectivity, DAB radio, paddle shifters, sunroof, tyre pressure monitoring
- Redbook future values: TBA

compare with...

BMW ActiveHybrid3; Lexus IS300h

JAGUAR **F-TYPE** FROM **$138,175**



Jaguar's F-Type two-seater convertible starts at $138,175 for the 250kW 3.0-litre V6 supercharged/eight-speed automatic.

The same drivetrain, with 280kW, is fitted to the F-Type S (as tested), priced at $170,575.

The F-Type V8 S, with a 364kW 5.0-litre supercharged V8/eight-speed auto, is $201,475.

These prices are pretty ambitious, both against rivals such as the Audi TTS, Mercedes SLK and Porsche Boxster, which costs almost $40,000 less (for the Boxster S, compared with the F-Type V6S) but also when you consider the Jaguar's lengthy options list. Sure, the V6S has beautiful leather, adaptive dampers, a push-button loud exhaust, 19-inch alloys and a mechanical limited-slip differential as standard, but should rain-sensing wipers, dual-zone air, tyre pressure monitoring, heated seats, stainless-steel pedal covers and swivelling headlights really be options on a $171,575 car?

The F-Type Coupe, which I haven't yet driven, on paper at least looks like a genuine, and well-priced, rival to Porsche's 911.

It's available with the same drivetrains, priced at $119,430 for the F-Type, $151,830 for the S and $219,130 for the V8 R, which in coupe specification gets 404kW of power and can hit 100km/h in just 4.2 seconds. I have driven this engine in the XFRS; here, with a lot less weight to shift, it would deliver exhilarating performance.

Jaguar never fails to deliver a smokin' performance engine and the 280kW supercharged V6 is a beauty too. Push the start button and it fires with a triumphant Varooom! On the move, it hauls effortlessly and relentlessly to the 6700rpm redline, though without any added top-end kick, so you tend to short shift at around 6000. Supercharger whine isn't intrusive, or perhaps it's simply out-louded by the amazing assortment of crackles, pops and chortles that emanate from the open bypass valves in the exhaust.

The eight-speed works well enough in cruise mode, however its shifts, in Sport or manual, can be slow when pushing hard, in part because the engine's torque needs to be modulated but also because its shift mapping isn't quite as finely tuned to the car's speed, attitude and throttle position as it should be. Porsche's PDK transmission is markedly superior in this regard.

There's little body roll and less understeer than expected but the Jag's centre of gravity seems unusually high and precarious, so it takes some time to trust. Although its steering points with great precision and responsiveness, it's slightly overassisted, a trait that also encourages caution.

Going harder, though, the Jag loses that initial top heaviness, feels closer and more connected to the road, and gains lovely poise and balance. The PZeros have ample grip, especially the 275/35 rears, with the fronts only beginning to struggle when pushed very hard and deep into the tightest corners. The limited slip diff, plus adjustable traction control, allow you to loosen the connection between rear rubber and bitumen. When you do, the car is forgiving, fun and entirely predictable in its response.

The cabin has typical Jaguar flourishes such as the Leaper motif displayed on start-up. Instruments and touch screen are dated, with indistinct fonts on the main dials, imprecise, fiddly screen menus and simplistic graphics. The F-Type's boot is tiny and if you carry the space-saver spare you'll have to send your bags by freight.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Gorgeous styling
- ✔ Supercharged performance
- ✔ Exuberant exhaust noises
- ✔ Responsive steering
- ✔ Lots of grip

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ Useless boot
- ✘ Dated, clumsy infotainment system
- ✘ Eight-speed's a bit dimwitted
- ✘ Jaguar's ongoing reliability issues

SPEX (V6 S convertible)

- Made in England
- 3.0-litre V6 supercharged petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 280kW of power at 6500rpm/460Nm of torque from 3500-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.8 seconds (claimed)
- 7.0L/100km highway; 12.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 213gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 19-inch alloy wheels, sports seats with leather facings, sports steering wheel with shift paddles, alarm, sports suspension with adaptive dampers, bi-xenon headlights, navigation.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...

BMW Z4 35is/M4, Audi RS5, Porsche Boxster/911

JAGUAR **XF** FROM **$68,075**



Jaguar's base petrol XF Luxury, priced at $68,075, runs the same 177kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four as the Falcon, but with an eight-speed automatic, standard across the XF range.

The 140kW 2.2-litre turbodiesel XF Luxury is $69,900.

Premium Luxury versions of both adds $6600.

The 3.0-litre V6 twin turbodiesel is $95,900 and the S Portfolio is $112,900.

The 250kW 3.0-litre supercharged petrol V6 Luxury is $95,295. The Portfolio is $110,430.

The 375kW supercharged 5.0-litre V8 XFR costs $189,075. The $222,075 XFR-S, with the same engine tuned for 404kW, is tested over the page.

The 3.0-litre V6 twin turbodiesel's 202kW is complemented by 600Nm of torque, yet average fuel consumption is just 6.3L/100km.

Its bottom end and midrange performance redefines the term effortless and it's exceptionally refined as well.

It takes 7.1 seconds to drive the Jag to 100km/h.

I've driven the 3.0-litre supercharged V6 in the F-Type, where it's got loads of character. It probably lacks the aural drama of the F-Type's variable exhaust in this application, but it's every bit as potent and capable, if not quite as soulful, as the 5.0-litre naturally aspirated V8 it replaced. The 0-100km/h trip takes just 5.9 seconds.

The XF is a heavy car, so it isn't a bend slicer like the BMW 5 Series or Lexus GS350 FSport.

It's more comparable to a Mercedes-Benz E Class, though there is a significant difference between the V6 diesel, which feels quite nose heavy, and the V6/V8s, which feel sharper and more responsive.

Ride comfort is excellent on most surfaces. The electric steering, though accurate and responsive when pointing into a corner, is slightly imprecise on centre.

The XFR has a slightly more direct steering rack ratio than other models, plus an active rear differential that can distribute up to 100 per cent of the torque to one side of the car.

You sit low in the XF in a luxurious armchair, in a bright, sleek cabin that bears little resemblance to the old club lounge ambience of Jags past.

Rear-seat legroom is fine for most occupants who also sit low, hemmed in by high window sills.

The boot is long, shallow and extendable with the 60/40 split-fold rear back seat. A space saver is underneath.

The XF is still competitive, especially under the bonnet, but only just. It's getting pretty long in the tooth.

This is immediately apparent when you climb in, so newer rivals such as Audi's A6, BMW's 5 Series, Mercedes E Class and the Lexus GS are hurting its showroom appeal.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Doesn't look like a relic from the 1960s
- ✔ Potent V6 turbodiesel and petrol engines, especially the supercharged 5.0 litre V8 in the XFR
- ✔ Tight body and tidy handling
- ✔ Compliant, quiet ride
- ✔ Attractive, efficient dash layout

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Unsupportive driver's seat
- ✘ Overweight
- ✘ Only four-star NCAP rating
- ✘ Slightly vague, remote steering

SPEX (3.0 V6 diesel)

- Made in England
- 3.0-litre V6 twin turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 202kW of power at 4000rpm/600Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.1 seconds
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.0L/100km highway; 8.7L/100km city. CO^2 emissions are 169gkm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, cruise control with speed limiter, alarm, 18-inch alloys, keyless entry and starting, Bluetooth connectivity, in-dash six-stack CD player, automatic dual-zone air, DVD navigation and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...

Audi A6, BMW 5 Series, Lexus GS, Mercedes-Benz E Class

JAGUAR **XFR-S** FROM **$222,075**



Jaguar's XFR-S is the fastest sedan the company has ever built, with a claimed 0-100km/h time of just 4.6 seconds and an electronically-governed top speed of 300km/h.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety ★★★★☆	Quality and reliability ★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide **N/A**	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★½☆☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★½☆

Priced at $222,545, the R-S uses the same all-aluminium 5.0-litre supercharged V8 fitted to the new F-Type R coupe.

With 404kW of power and 680Nm of torque, the latter available from 2500rpm, the Jaguar unloads exceptionally potent performance from any speed when you give the accelerator a squeeze, however at 1875kg it's a heavy lump, featuring an all-steel body rather than the lighter aluminium construction usually favoured for the Big Cats.

So in a straight-line drag it's fractionally outgunned by the M5 and E63; all are whipped by Audi's RS6, for which just 3.8 seconds is claimed.

Given the R-S's weight, a "take no prisoners" approach is to be expected with suspension. Lateral stiffness and spring rates are both 30 per cent higher than XFR, while many other components have been stiffened and strengthened as well. The hydraulic steering features quicker response, with F-Type valving.

Although the R-S always feels big and heavy, it's also tidy, surprisingly well balanced and communicative. The steering is precise and tactile and the ride is reasonably comfortable given the R-S's uncompromising brief.

If the Audi RS6 and BMW M5 are too much techno for you, and the Mercedes E63 AMG is too much aggro, you may find Jaguar's "gentleman's musclecar" approach with the XFR-S just right. Worth a drive.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ It's not a German car
- ✔ Effortless power
- ✔ Tidy, engaging handling for a big sedan
- ✔ Superb driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Touch-screen infotainment system requires too much eyes-off-the-road time to operate and is out of the dark ages
- ✘ Heavy
- ✘ Pricey
- ✘ Jaguar reliability issues

SPEX

- Made in England
- 5.0-litre supercharged V8/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 404kW of power at 6500rpm/680Nm of torque from 2500-5500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.6 seconds (claimed)
- 8.6L/100km highway; 16.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 270gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 20-inch alloy wheels, adaptive dampers, carbon-fibre front splitter and rear diffuser, Meridian audio, Bluetooth, navigation
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Audi RS6, BMW M5, Mercedes E63 AMG

JAGUAR **XJ** FROM **$198,800**



The 202kW/600Nm 3.0 V6 twin turbodiesel/eight speed automatic Premium Luxury opens the XJ range, priced from $198,800.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety **Not yet tested**	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★☆☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

Its prodigious torque delivery starts at about 15rpm and as a real-world engine it's the rational choice to make.

But this is a Jaguar, so one expects some suitably energetic and ruthless petrol power as the baseline from which to work. The 250kW/450Nm supercharged 3.0-litre V6 petrol Premium Luxury is priced from $197,975.

Long wheelbase versions, which add another 125mm of back-seat legroom are available for no extra charge over the short wheelbase models.

The 3.0-litre supercharged V6 Portfolio is $221,775.

You will certainly get loud, big cat-style noises and performance from the 5.0-litre supercharged V8, which packs 375kW/625Nm in the weapons-grade Supersport, which dispatches the 0–100km/h trip in a claimed 4.7 seconds.

It will set you back just $297,530.

The XJ is a suprisingly athletic drive for such a big beast. Sure, it's not quite in the Porsche Panamera league, but its no barge either.

The interior is out there in a slightly retro way, with lots of fighter plane design cues and splashes of chrome. The driving position is a cockpit style, which makes the car feel smaller than it really is.

Like most limos, XJ resale values are terrible.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Light and agile for its size
- ✔ All the engines are crackers
- ✔ Wild cockpit design
- ✔ Comfortable ride
- ✔ Precise, tactile steering

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ They ran out of design inspiration by the time they got to the back end
- ✘ Small boot
- ✘ Awful resale values

SPEX (5.0V8 S/C Supersport)

- Made in England
- 5.0-litre supercharged V8/eight-speed, auto/rear-wheel drive
- 375kW of power at 6000rpm/625Nm of torque at 2500-5500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.9 seconds
- 8.7L/100km highway; 18.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 289gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, leather upholstery, four-zone air, 20-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, USB input, hard disc storage, proximity key, front and rear parking sensors, sunroof, voice activation, DVD player
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 40%; 5yr: 28%

compare with...

Audi A7, BMW 7 Series, Mercedes-Benz S Class, Porsche Panamera

KIA **RIO** FROM **$15,990**



The Kia Rio used to be a cheap, disposable tin box. It's not now. In fact, it's up there with the Volkswagen Polo as one of the best small cars on the market.

When you factor in reliability, running costs, warranty — the longest on the market at seven years/unlimited kilometres — value and interior space, all areas in which it beats the Volkswagen, the Rio is arguably *the* best small car on the market.

The range opens with the 79kW 1.4-litre three door S, priced at $15,990 with a six-speed manual or $17,990 with a four-speed automatic.

The base five-door S hatch with the same drivetrains is $16,990/$18,990.

The three door SLS, with a 1.6-litre direct-injection petrol four, is $20,490, or $22,490 with a six-speed automatic.

The 1.6-litre Si automatic sedan is $21,690.

The car tested here is the five door 1.6-litre Si six-speed manual, priced at $19,490/$21,490

The top-of-the-range five-door SLi is $20,490/$22,490.

The 1.6-litre engine is one of the most technically advanced of its type. It's naturally aspirated with direct injection, which helps it achieve outstanding fuel economy on 91 octane regular unleaded, very low CO^2 emissions and a five-star *Green Vehicle Guide* rating.

The six-speed transmission also contributes, as well as disguising its peaky nature, which has maximum torque arriving at nearly 5000rpm.

The engine feels more tractable than that, pulling easily and very smoothly through the lower gears. At 100km/h in sixth, it's pulling 2500rpm, so on highway hills and when overtaking you have to go down a gear or two, but the manual is light and precise so that's no problem at all.

Handling is excellent for a small car, as is ride comfort.

Kia enlists local engineering input for its suspension and steering tuning, and it shows, especially on rough roads, where the Rio absorbs big hits with remarkable ease and comfort for a small car.

The body feels solid and strong and it's also safe, with a five-star ANCAP rating.

The Rio's electric power steering is a bit vague at freeway speeds, though.

Inside, there's ample occupant space and a big boot with a full-size spare (on a steel wheel) under the floor.

Size-wise, the Rio sits between tiddlers such as the Mazda2/ Toyota Yaris and larger cars such as Toyota's Corolla and Hyundai's i30, so it's just big enough to work as a family car if you have one or two young kids.

The seats are comfortable, the driving position is adjustable for all physiques and the dash is simple and formal, very much like a Volkswagen — a reflection of Kia's Euro-clone design approach.

Fit and finish quality in the cabin is outstanding and there's plenty of handy storage, including big door bins and a centre console box.

The Rio is also a great-looking car and for around $20,000 you get plenty of gear in the Si, including 16-inch alloys, a leather-wrapped steering wheel, trip computer, cruise control, Bluetooth and iPod connectivity with steering-wheel controls and hill-start assist.

Can't argue with that. The Rio Si is recommended. The three-door SLS is also a winner and absolutely loaded with leather upholstery, 17-inch alloy wheels, automatic air- and rain-sensing wipers included.

An update is due in local showrooms mid-year.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Good value for money, long warranty and low running costs
- ✔ Refined, efficient 1.6
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Five-star safety and green scores
- ✔ Spacious, well-finished, comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Steering wanders around a bit at freeway speeds
- ✘ Seat fabrics on Korean cars can fray early

SPEX (Si five-door manual)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre, direct-injection, petrol, four-cylinder/six-speed manual/ front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 6300rpm/167Nm of torque at 4850rpm
- 0–100km/h in 10.2 seconds (claimed)
- 4.4L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 133gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, leather-wrapped steering wheel and gear lever knob, Bluetooth, iPod connectivity, cruise control, hill-start assist
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 44%

compare with...

Mazda2, Renault Clio, Suzuki Swift, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

KIA **RONDO** FROM **$30,240**



If you have a few kids, the seven-seater Kia Rondo makes sense for many reasons, not least of which is its affordable price.

The base-model Si, with a 122kW 2.0-litre petrol engine, is $30,240; SLI specification is $34,240 and top-of-the-range Platinum is $39,740.

Si and SLi are also available with a 100kW 1.7-litre turbodiesel, priced at $32,990 and $36,990 respectively, the latter tested here.

A six-speed automatic is standard in all models. So are many clever people-mover features tailor-made to keep parents and kids happy and safe. These include seatbelt warning indicators and chimes for all positions, a rear camera and parking sensors, four 12-volt outlets, speed-sensing automatic door locks, row-two vents and six airbags (the side-curtain airbags not extending to the two rear seats, however).

SLi adds a convex mirror so you can keep an eye on the kids, fold-up tables on the back of the front seats and dual-zone air.

Platinum also has a chilled glovebox, blinds for the row-two side windows, and a full-length sunroof.

The Rondo's interior is comfortable and well organised.

Row two consists of three individual seats, each of which can slide along its own track to adjust legroom. The one-touch slide/folding backrest function provides easy access to the back seats.

There's ample legroom and the seats themselves are generously padded and supportive.

Storage includes nets on the front seatbacks and small door bins, while a 12-volt outlet is adjacent to the vents on the back of the centre console.

Each of the two back seats folds up easily from the floor, but they are really only suitable for young kids because there is no footwell, so older kids and adults don't so much sit as squat, which would become pretty uncomfortable on anything but a short trip.

Still, as occasional seats for friends, or the Saturday sport run, they're fine.

In five-seater mode the boot is huge, with a low, easy-to-load floor and a load cover underneath.

With each row-two seat — and the front passenger seat in SLi and Platinum — folding flat as well, you have a lot of options to configure the Rondo to suit your specific people/gear-carrying requirements.

The 1.7-litre turbodiesel is perfect for the people mover application, with plenty of torque to easily pull a load and reasonable fuel efficiency. It works seamlessly with the six-speed automatic and on test — admittedly unladen — returned 7.4L/100km.

Rondo's dynamics are quite secure, though the front end is soft so it can bounce a bit on undulations and is punished by a decent pothole, which can easily see it run out of travel and give the body a whack. The Hankook tyres have reasonable grip and are quiet, with very little resonance reaching the cabin. The ride is smooth and supple on all but the worst surfaces and the brakes are up to it. The electric steering's three-way adjustment is a gimmick and on-centre feel is terrible at highway speeds, but around town it's fine and the Rondo is easy to park.

The Rondo is excellent value for money; its practical virtues will be appreciated every time you load it up with kids and gear.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ One of the better kid carriers
- ✔ Practical, versatile interior
- ✔ 1.7 turbodiesel/six-speed auto is a natural fit
- ✔ Comfortable and quiet

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Curtain airbags don't cover back seats
- ✘ Back seats only suitable for young kids or very short trips
- ✘ Front suspension is too soft
- ✘ Vague on-centre steering feel at highway speeds
- ✘ No voice control for infotainment system

SPEX

- Made in South Korea
- 1.7-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power at 4000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.4L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 170gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, alarm, leather-faced seat upholstery, 10-way power-adjustable driver's seat, rain-sensing wipers, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB connection
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Citroën Grand Picasso, Honda Odyssey, Hyundai i Max

KIA **CERATO** FROM **$19,990**



In its bones, Kia's Cerato is basically the same car as Hyundai's Elantra/i30. The Kia gets a bespoke Euro-style interior, and a powerful 2.0-litre direct-injection petrol engine option.

The range opens with the 110kW 1.8-litre petrol S, with a six-speed manual, priced at $19,990. A six-speed auto adds $2200.

S Premium, with the auto as standard, is $24,990.

Si grade has the 129kW 2.0-litre engine, with the six-speed auto transmission, is $28,990. SLi, with the same drivetrain but more fruit, is $31,990.

The 2.0-litre engine is a strong, willing device that returns good economy on regular unleaded and is a neat fit with the automatic. It's one of the best performers in the class.

Kia's suspension is tailored for our rough roads, so it's pretty firm, and on the SLi's 17-inch alloys the ride can be a bit hard, especially around town.

The Si's 16-inchers, on higher-profile tyres, give you greater compliance without sacrificing handling ability.

The Cerato is a classy, comfortable piece inside, albeit rather dark and understated in its attempt to mimic a Euro cabin. Fit and finish quality are A-grade and the car is backed by Kia's five-year/unlimited-kilometres warranty. Navigation adds $1000, but is only available on the SLi.

Back-seat space is average. There's more in Civic, Corolla or Pulsar. A big boot has a full-size spare underneath.

If you're after a sedan or hatch in this class, the Cerato automatic is worth a drive.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality, reliability ★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Powerful 2.0-litre engine
- ✔ Secure, responsive handling
- ✔ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✔ Si is well priced
- ✔ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Ride isn't supple
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Some engine vibration at high revs
- ✘ Back-seat space isn't huge
- ✘ Three-way electric steering is a gimmick

SPEX (Si auto)
- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 129kW of power at 6500rpm/209Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.0 seconds (claimed)
- 5.4L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO^2 emissions are 169gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, cloth upholstery, Bluetooth with audio streaming, keyless starting, camera, automatic headlights, 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 30%

compare with...
Holden Cruze, Hyundai i30/Elantra, Nissan Pulsar, Subaru Impreza

KIA **OPTIMA** FROM **$31,490**



If you're looking for a family sedan, the Kia Optima offers typically generous value for money.

Consider this: for $40,490 the Optima Platinum includes leather upholstery, dual-zone air, heated and cooled driver's seat, a sunroof, rear-view camera, 18-inch alloy wheels including a full-size spare, and a five-year/unlimited kilometres warranty.

The base Optima Si is $31,490. The Optima SLi is $36,490.

All versions run Hyundai's direct-injection 2.4-litre petrol engine with a six-speed auto, equipped with wheel paddles should you feel the urge to pretend that the Optima is a serious sports sedan.

It's not, but the 2.4 is strong and lively above 3000rpm. Below this point, the six-speed has close enough lower ratios to mask its lack of torque. Fuel economy and refinement are excellent.

Kia engaged Australian engineering input to ensure the right ride/handling compromise for our rough, coarse chip road surfaces.

There's still some steering kickback, though, and weighting remains inconsistent, particularly on open road corners where the connection between steering and road seems to disappear.

The driver's seat is sized for large American (and Australian) physiques. The dash and instrument panel are done Audi-style — a simple, elegant layout executed with great attention to detail.

The comfortable back seat has plenty of space and storage; the sunroof extends to the back seats as well. The big boot features an extendable function.

There are many quality mid-size sedans on the market now, with Mazda's 6 the pick of them, and the Optima is showing its age against newer rivals. An update is long overdue.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Good value for money
- ✔ Excellent fit and finish quality
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Competent dynamics
- ✔ Powerful, fuel-efficient drivetrain

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Steering loses feel at speed and there's still some kickback
- ✘ Getting pretty long in the tooth against much newer rivals

SPEX (Platinum)
- Made in South Korea
- 2.4-litre direct-injection petrol/six-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 148kW of power at 6300rpm/250Nm of torque at 4250rpm
- 0-100km/h: N/A
- 6.0L/100km highway; 11.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 189gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, dual-zone air, heated and cooled driver's seat, a sunroof, iPod and Bluetooth connectivity, rear-view camera, 18-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...
Holden Malibu, Honda Accord, Hyundai i40, Mazda6, VW Jetta

KIA **PRO_CEE'D GT** FROM **$29,990**



"Kias are exciting to drive!" Now there's something nobody's ever said before.

Sure, the Korean brand's wares are good value, especially the Rio, one of the best small cars around, the similarly impressive Sorento family SUV and the Rondo people mover. Lately, Kias have been handsome too. But there's been nothing to get really excited about ... until now.

Enter the Pro_cee'd GT. Ignoring the appalling grammar — from here on, we will use correct English and call it the Proceed — it is the three-door version of the German-engineered and Slovakian-built Cee'd small car, which isn't sold here.

The what? Kia's answer to the Ford Focus, the Cee'd is essentially a Cerato honed to more exacting European tastes — right down to a sophisticated multi-link independent rear suspension system in place of the cheaper space-saving torsion beam set-up serving most of the marque's other models.

In eight years and two generations, it has helped boost Kia's reputation convincingly in Europe. Now the Proceed strives to do the same for Kia over here.

Priced from $29,990 for the red one (metallics add $595), the GT straddles the light and small-car heroes such as Volkswagen's respective Polo and Golf GTIs. The GT Tech is $34,990.

Whichever you choose, the cabin looks the business. Despite lashings of plastic, the Proceed's upper-dash sports well-made soft-touch quality materials while the racy seats, *de rigeur* red stitching and sporty driving position also liven things up. A neat electronic display switches the speedo from simulated analogue to digital, bringing with it cool torque output and turbo boost gauges.

Only the forward-jutting Recaro headrests and limited visibility cop a serve.

The Kia matches the Golf size-wise, so there's space for five adults (at a squeeze) and a large cargo area beneath the slinky coupe-like lines.

Kia insists the GT is a "warm" rather than 'hot' hatch, and sure enough, the 1.6-litre direct-injection twin-scroll turbo's 150kW/265Nm outputs fall significantly shy of the Golf GTI's 2.0-litre unit. Furthermore, the Proceed is heavier by about two adults so it doesn't so much bolt off the line as sprint away enthusiastically.

The GT draws from a fat wedge of torque for a forceful kick from about 2000rpm. Acceleration builds strongly and smoothly after that.

There's plenty of gear-changing necessary to keep the Proceed on the boil through a tight set of corners — a slick-shifting six-speed manual is the only available transmission — but the drivetrain's performance and refinement ultimately impress.

So do the (electric) steering, roadholding and brakes, courtesy of a raft of Australian tuning upgrades for improved response and stability. Kia Europe already invested hundreds of hours honing the chassis on the German autobahns and Nurburgring circuit, resulting in a sharp, balanced and well-controlled car.

However away from smooth roads, the steering rack can rattle a little, the suspension's damping is on the harsh side and road-noise intrusion is prevalent over some of our coarser surfaces. So the Proceed lacks the final poise, precision and driver interactivity of the better hot-hatches such as Golf GTi and Renault Megane RS265.

That said, the GT is still Kia's best driver's car to date, and astounding value for the performance, size, packaging and specification (including a five-year warranty and capped-price servicing) it offers.

By Byron Mathioudakis

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Head-turning design inside and out
- ✔ Fantastic value for money
- ✔ Eager turbo performance
- ✔ Sharp steering and tenacious roadholding
- ✔ Five-year warranty and fixed-price servicing
- ✔ Spacious and comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Firm ride over bumpy roads
- ✘ No automatic availability
- ✘ Steering isn't hot-hatch tactile
- ✘ Some road-noise intrusion
- ✘ Recaro front seats' headrests protrude too much

SPEX (GT)

- Made in Slovakia
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder petrol turbo/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 150kW of power at 5000rpm/265Nm of torque from 1750-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.7 seconds
- 6.1L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city; 91 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 171g/km
- Warranty: Seven-years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: six airbags, stability control, automatic air, camera, rear-parking sensors, Bluetooth with audio streaming and smartphone connectivity, 18-inch alloys with Michelin Pilot Sport 225/40ZR18 tyres, Recaro front seats; GT Tech adds sunroof, swivelling headlights, push-button start and tinted glass
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Ford Fiesta ST, VW Polo GTI, Renault Clio RS200, Ford Focus ST, VW Golf GTI

KIA **SPORTAGE** FROM **$25,990**



Kia is a subsidiary of Hyundai, so, as the Kia Sorento shares the same architecture as the Hyundai Santa Fe, the Kia Sportage is also a sibling of the Hyundai ix35.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★½☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★½☆

The Sportage opens with the 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol front-wheel-drive Si at $25,990 with a five-speed manual or $28,190 with a six-speed auto.

The all-wheel-drive 2.0-litre SLi is $34,990 with a six-speed auto. The Platinum is $38,590.

The 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto/all-wheel-drive SLi is $37,990. The Platinum, tested here, is $41,590.

That's a fairly hefty ask for a compact SUV but the Sportage is solid and well built.

The diesel chugs along easily in the high gears, never feels strained and the Sportage gets up and goes in a hurry when you need to overtake.

The steering is too light and remote, the front-to-rear torque distribution isn't the most seamless in the world (there's also a fair bit of torque steer before the back wheels get some drive) and the brakes lack bite and power.

Interior space is, obviously, comparable with the ix35, which means that Sportage is tighter than a Forester but has reasonable back seat as well as boot space.

The Platinum's seats have leather faces and supposedly matching vinyl on the sides and backs, but the colours and textures don't match so it looks awful.

Otherwise, the Sportage is a commendably bad-taste-free zone, with a formal, Euro-style interior design theme.

An updated Sportage range is due in showrooms this year.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Easy urge from the 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed auto
- ✔ Tidy handling and ride
- ✔ Platinum is loaded
- ✔ Camera located in the rear view mirror is a great idea

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Weak brakes
- ✘ Remote-control steering
- ✘ Fuel numbers aren't great for a 2.0-litre turbodiesel
- ✘ 2.0-litre petrol, front-wheel drive is a pretty ordinary thing

SPEX (2.0 CRDi Platinum)
- Made in Slovakia
- 2.0-litre, turbodiesel/six-speed, automatic/all-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 4000rpm/392Nm of torque from 1800–2500rpm
- 0–100km/h: N/A
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- 6.0L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 198gkm
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, 18-inch alloys, dual-zone air, leather seat facings, sunroof, rear camera, iPod connectivity, six-stack CD player, keyless entry, heated and cooled driver's seat.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 44%

compare with...
Hyundai ix35, Mazda CX5, Nissan Dualis, Subaru XV, VW Tiguan

KIA **CERATO KOUP** FROM **$24,190**



Kia's stylish Cerato Koup is available in two variants.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★½☆	★★★½☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

The GDi Si, priced at $24,190, runs a 129kW, 2.0-litre direct-injection naturally aspirated engine. The T-GDi Turbo, priced at $28,190, uses a 150kW 1.5-litre turbopetrol engine, also found in the Hyundai Veloster Turbo.

A six-speed manual is standard; a six-speed auto adds $2300 to both models. An optional Touring pack, available on the Turbo only, includes leather, navigation, a DVD player, touch-screen infotainment and dual-zone air. It adds $2500.

The Koup Turbo (tested) goes up against comparably priced small hot hatchbacks such as the Ford Fiesta ST, Peugeot 208GTi and the Renault Clio RS200, though it's a much larger car than these two, with much more back seat space and a bigger boot. Size-wise, it's closer to a Golf GTi or a Renault Megane RS265, both of which start north of $40K.

It's a nicely sorted piece, more sporty-ish than outright sporty, and you could look at the Kia as a compact GT-style coupe, though the ride is pretty firm. Dynamics are competent enough, however you don't get the same responsiveness, agility or steering precision as the Fiesta or the Renault.

The 1.6-litre turbo is an enjoyable, willing engine, with a smooth, strong surge of turbo-torque from low revs, so around town or having fun on your favourite piece of road, it's never wanting.

Inside, the Koup features pukka dark decor; you also get a body-hugging driver's seat, plenty of gear, easy access to the rear and a full-size alloy spare.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Stylish and well built
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Refined, tractable 1.6 turbo
- ✔ Competent dynamics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Firm ride
- ✘ Not quite in the Euro hot hatch league for handling or driver enjoyment
- ✘ Artificial, disconnected steering feel

SPEX
- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 150kW of power at 6000rpm/265Nm of torque from 1750-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 10.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 184gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloys, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, Bluetooth, LED running lights, chilled glovebox and alloy pedals
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...
Ford Fiesta ST, Hyundai Veloster, Peugeot 208GTi, Renault Clio RS200

LAMBORGHINI **HURACÁN LP 610-4** FROM **$428,000**



Named after a famous Spanish fighting bull from the late 1800s, the Huracán is Lamborghini's new "junior" supercar, stepping into the shoes of the big-selling and long-serving Gallardo, a car that also shares familial DNA with Audi's R8.

Huracán is powered by an upgraded version of its predecessor's 5.2-litre, naturally-aspirated V10 engine, with 449kW of power and 560Nm of torque going through a seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox, to all four wheels.

At just under 4.5m long, 1.9m wide and a touch less than 1.2m high, the Huracán has a classically dramatic supercar stance — bigger in every key dimension, and (despite a hybrid aluminium and carbon-fibre chassis) 12kg heavier than the Gallardo.

The AWD system is now electronically controlled, with a driving dynamics system switchable through three modes: Strada (road), Sport and Corsa (race).

One of the most significant mechanical changes is the move from the previous E-gear, automated manual, single-clutch gearbox to a new version of its Audi R8 cousin's twin-clutch transmission, called LDF (Lamborghini Doppia Frizione).

An electronically controlled, Lamborghini Dynamic Steering (LDS) system and Magneto-Rheologic active suspension, using magnetically controlled shock absorbers, are optionally available.

This supercar lives up to its name, with near-instant throttle response from the big atmo V10, and a spine-tingling howl to go with its stunning acceleration. Claimed 0-100km/h time is 3.2 seconds (half a second quicker than the Gallardo), 0-200km/h comes up in 9.9 seconds and maximum speed is 325km/h.

The LDF gearbox delivers unbelievably rapid and positive shifts, while the aluminium double-wishbone suspension (front and rear) and 20-inch rims shod with Pirelli PZero rubber (245/30 front/ 305/30 rear) combine to deliver sensational grip.

Body control is good but the Huracán's closest competitor, Ferrari's 458 Italia, is better. That said, the car feels taut and agile, and you can feel the electronic AWD system shifting from the standard 70:30 rear to front drive percentage, to 100:0, or up to a maximum 50:50 if required, getting the car's huge power down superbly.

Standard steering is electro-mechanically assisted, with a ratio of 16.2:1, but our test car was fitted with the optional LDS system, which can vary the ratio by almost 100 per cent (9:1 – 17:1). In city traffic, the LDS is direct, and less so at high speeds to help with direction change stability.

There's no doubt the steering provides good road feel, but it's not in the same league as a Porsche 911 or Ferrari 458. On the open road, shifting from Strada to Sport mode increases weight but not feel.

The seating position and ergonomics are brilliant and the big carbon-ceramic brakes are amazing. This is a supercar with looks to die for, suitably stunning performance and, in the rarefied air of the exotic sports car market, a sharp price.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★½
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Awesome performance
- ✔ Brilliant gearbox
- ✔ Excellent ergonomics
- ✔ Sensational carbon brakes
- ✔ Aggressive pricing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Reversing camera is a $5900 option
- ✘ Body control bested by Ferrari 458 Italia
- ✘ Steering delivers good, but not great road feel
- ✘ LDS steering system optional
- ✘ Heavier than the Gallardo it replaces

SPEX

- Made in Italy
- 5.2-litre V10 petrol/seven-speed dual clutch/all-wheel drive
- 449kW of power at 8250rpm/560Nm of torque at 6500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.2 seconds (claimed)
- 9.4L/100km highway; 17.8L/100km city, 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 290g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, four airbags, carbon-ceramic brakes, electrically adjustable heated seats, full (Nappa) leather trim, LED headlights, tyre pressure monitor, climate-control air conditioning, cruise control, 12.3-inch TFT infotainment display screen, 20-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...

Ferrari 458 Italia, Porsche 911 Turbo S

LEXUS **ES** FROM **$63,400**



The Lexus ES returned to Australia in 2014 after a six-year hiatus. Start money is $63,400 for the petrol/electric hybrid ES 300h Luxury. The ES350 V6 petrol is $64,900. Sports Luxury versions of both, with extra gear, cost $72,400 and $73,900 respectively.

The Lexus is closely based on the Camry-derived, US-market Avalon, whose ancestor Barry Humphries spruiked unsuccessfully here in the early 2000s. It's also directly related to the locally made Toyota Camry Hybrid and Aurion.

Looking every inch a contemporary Lexus, the exquisitely made cabin is swathed in lush materials and swish ambient lighting, backed up by an alluring high-tech dashboard featuring a (fiddly) mouse-style controller for the central screen.

It is the sheer expanse of rear-seat space — with one metre of legroom — that sets the Lexus apart against all rivals bar the Holden Caprice. However, while the V6's boot offers a reasonable 490 litres, the 300h concedes 65 litres due to the hybrid-related gear, mainly the battery. Both models include a full-size spare wheel.

Aimed at luring premium Euro buyers who don't like or want a diesel, the 300h runs Toyota's 118kW/213Nm 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol unit, as used in the Camry Hybrid, combined with a 105kW/270Nm electric motor and a 244.8-volt nickel-metal hydride battery.

Maximum system power is rated at 151kW, channelled to the front wheels via a Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT).

With the three-stage driving mode system set to Normal or Sport, it is capable of an 8.5-second sprint to 100km/h, which is pretty respectable, certainly by diesel standards; conversely, in Eco mode, the 300h takes 9.6 seconds to reach 100km/h but averages just 5.5L/100km — nearly half the V6's thirst. Both engines also run happily on regular unleaded.

The V6's 204kW/346Nm, 3.5-litre V6/six-speed auto combo delivers the rapid refinement expected from the Lexus marque, as opposed to the 300h's sometimes-raucous demeanour.

Silent at first thanks to electric-only power, the four-pot petrol steps in seamlessly as speeds rise, but the revs flair up incongruously if instant acceleration is required, accompanied by a droning CVT that only really feels sufficiently responsive in Sport.

Lexus says it has worked hard to contain harshness and vibration, engineering plenty of sound deadening and a rigid base for the MacPherson strut and dual-link rear suspension set-up.

Sure enough, on smooth, straight roads, the ES stays on-brand, isolating its occupants effectively. However the tyres rumble over coarse bitumen and bumps are felt with monotonous regularity.

The electric steering is light and lifeless, yet will load up for a heavy and ponderous feel at speed. Add ever-present pitching and the Lexus heaves tiresomely, like an old Yank tank.

So dynamically the ES is a throwback to the bad old days of Japanese "luxury" cars, with an insufficiently robust suspension calibration for Australia's conditions. Through any set of bends, it won't see which way a Holden VF Calais, or Caprice, went. Toyota's Aurion and Camry Hybrid also have a superior ride/handling compromise because their suspension has been tuned for local conditions.

The locally made Camry Hybrid and Aurion offer almost identical drivetrain technology to the Lexus ES, in the same-sized car — in fact the same car in most respects bar the badge and the decor — at nearly half the price.

So the main question when contemplating an ES is: Why pay so much for a Toyota?

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★½☆☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★☆☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★★
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★½☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Huge rear-seat space
- ✔ Excellent fuel economy in ES 300h
- ✔ Luxurious cabin
- ✔ Loaded with gear
- ✔ Lexus quality and reliability, backed by a four-year warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ It's an overpriced Toyota Camry Hybrid/Toyota Aurion V6
- ✘ Remote control steering
- ✘ Ponderous handling and a queasy ride
- ✘ Coarse, noisy hybrid drivetrain under acceleration
- ✘ Small boot in hybrid

SPEX (ES 300h)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/electric motor hybrid/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 118kW of power at 5700rpm/151kW system total/213Nm of torque at 4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.5 seconds
- 5.2L/100km highway; 6.0L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO^2 emissions are 130g/km
- Warranty: Four years/100,000 kilometres; eight years on hybrid system battery
- Standard: 10 airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, part leather upholstery, rear camera, parking sensors, blind-spot monitor, dual-zone air, sunroof, heated front seats, navigation, digital radio, Bluetooth audio and phone and a powered rear sunshade
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Holden Calais/Caprice, Nissan Altima, Toyota Camry Hybrid/Aurion

LEXUS **GS** FROM **$76,530**



The nine-car Lexus GS range starts at $76,530 for the 154kW 2.5-litre V6 Luxury and tops out at $123,500 with the GS450h Sports Luxury hybrid.

The model that deserves your attention is the GS350 F-Sport, at $99,430.

Like Audi's A6 3.0TFSi quattro, this is now a deadly serious player on Benz E Class and BMW 5 Series' turf and if you're in this market it's now a four-way contest for your money.

The GS' 233kW 3.5-litre direct and port-injection naturally aspirated V6 doesn't have the peerless 2000-4000rpm shove of the supercharged Audi and turbo-torqued BMW and Mercedes 3.0-litre sixes. The 2.5-litre engine's 253Nm is less grunt than BMW and Mercedes' 2.0-litre turbocharged base-spec fours (as used in the 520i and E250) produce, so it needs a shorter diff to compensate.However, if you like unadulterated atmo power, where the technique involves sticking the right boot hard into a lode of snap-responsive, free-spinning, highly sonorous revs, both deliver plenty from 4000-7000rpm. The GS350's top end, in particular, is wonderfully entertaining; the 250's less so because it takes a long while to get there and when you do it's pretty mild. Overall, the smaller engine is off the pace.

Both engines use considerably more fuel than their German brand equivalents.

You have to select Sport+ to get the F-Sport working properly. Lexus is still ultra-conservative, especially compared with BMW, in its definition of "Sport", so the 350's most extreme settings for the drivetrain, adaptive dampers, variable-ratio steering (with dynamic rear steering as well, like the 535i) and traction/stability systems are the equivalent of BMW's chill-out Normal.

Even in Sport+, the Lexus six-speed auto is sleepy. The manual shift paddles flick it into life and in this mode shifts are fast, smooth and accompanied by a blip of the revs on downchanges.

Here's a shock. The GS350 F-Sport argues with the 535i over who gets into a corner first and who comes out best. Both have exquisite balance for biggish, circa 1.7-tonne sedans, plus small-car agility and tight body control. The Lexus rides more comfortably, though.

Both also prove that the "hydraulic steering is best" case is lost. The GS's electric-assist/variable ratio/rear-wheel steer combination is light, talkative and dagger sharp in the way it points the car at an apex then holds, or adjusts with the gentlest touch, your desired line.

You also get a stylish, loaded interior that, this time, doesn't look like a tizzed-up Toyota.

The dash and control layout is similar to the Five Series with minimal buttons, clean, uncluttered, informative instruments, and a controller to move a cursor around a huge display screen.

The seats, front and rear (shaped as two individual seats), are luxuriously comfortable and supportive, and there's plenty of rear legroom.

Lexus also delivers the best quality and customer service in the business, ownership costs that won't kill you like the German wallet scrapers and, on the 350 F-Sport, a $15,000-$35,000 discount on its Audi/BMW/Benz rivals' prices.

In the end, though, this is the premier sedan league so how it drives is what really counts. That's why a test drive in the Lexus GS350 F-Sport is highly recommended.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★★
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Powerful, rev-hungry, responsive atmo engines
- ✔ Poised, agile handling and a comfortable ride
- ✔ Spacious, comfortable, elegant interior
- ✔ Best in the business quality and customer service
- ✔ Excellent value for money

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Both engines are relatively sedate below 3500rpm or so
- ✘ They are also thirsty
- ✘ BMW and Mercedes 2.0-litre turbopetrol fours slaughter Lexus' 2.5-litre atmo V6
- ✘ Six-speed auto is slow and unresponsive in Drive

SPEX (GS350 F-Sport)

- Made in Japan
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/six-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 233kW of power at 6400rpm/378Nm of torque at 4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.0 seconds (claimed)
- 7.4L/100km highway; 13.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 225gkm
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: Ten airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, heated, cooled leather-upholstered, 16-way power-adjustable driver's seat, blind-spot monitor, 12.3-inch screen, Bluetooth with audio streaming, head-up display, driver-fatigue monitor, radar cruise control
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Audi A6 3.0TFSi quattro, BMW 535i, Mercedes E400

LEXUS **CT200H** FROM **$39,990**



The Lexus CT200h is the Toyota Prius' hybrid/electric powertrain repackaged in a smaller, shinier Lexus box. It's pitched at people who don't like diesel and are looking for something a bit techno, luxo and glossy, but can't find it in a European car shop.

Prices start at $39,990 for the base model. That's $6000 more than a Prius. The FSport, tested here, costs $48,990. The Sport Luxury is $56,990.

Never before in the history of automotive engineering has such extravagant money been asked for such ordinary performance. And as for the "Sport" label, forget it.

Toyota's 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/electric hybrid drivetrain is smooth, refined and incredibly fuel efficient, with ample performance for everyday use — especially in the city, where the main benefits of hybrid technology are realised — but sporty it most certainly is not.

Neither are the CT200's dynamics. Lexus tried to improve the ride/handling compromise on the April 2014 update with body strengthening and suspension changes. It certainly needed work, because the pre-update model drove like a $20,000 hatchback with average handling and a rather sharp, choppy ride on rough roads.

Inside, the FSport has luxuriously comfortable seats and plenty of gear, including leather and navigation as standard. Back-seat legroom is quite tight, as is boot space.

The CT200h isn't a bad car but it's difficult to justify its prices. Certainly, the hybrid technology works — the Prius proves that — but to put a $5000-$20,000 premium on the Lexus badge in a smaller, less practical car is stretching credibility.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★★	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★½☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Great fuel economy in city traffic
- ✔ Lexus quality, reliability and customer service
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Luxurious front seats in FSport

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ "Sport" is inaccurate nomenclature
- ✘ Tight rear seat and boot space

SPEX (FSport)
- Made in Japan
- 1.8-litre petrol/electric hybrid/CVT/ front-wheel drive
- 100kW (combined); 73kW of power at
- 5200rpm/142Nm of torque at 4400rpm(engine only)
- 0-100km/h in 10.3 seconds
- 4.1L/100km highway; 4.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 95gkm
- Standard: eight airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, dual-zone air, navigation, reversing camera, body kit, tinted glass, sports suspension
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...
BMW 1 Series, Mercedes A Class, Volkswagen Golf, Volvo V40

LEXUS **RX** FROM **$68,575**



Against very strong competition from Audi's Q5, Volvo's XC60, the Range Rover Evoque, Mercedes M Class and BMW's X3, the Lexus RX's case is no longer persuasive.The range opens with the 138kW, 2.7-litre four cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive RX270 at $68,575.

The 204kW 3.5-litre V6 all-wheel-drive Luxury is $76,575, the F-Sport is $84,575 and the Sports Luxury is $93,075.

RX buyers want — and get — a wagon that's flawlessly screwed together and loaded with stuff. Off-road ability is irrelevant.

The 204kW 3.5-litre V6 is matched with a six-speed auto. It's adequate, but thirsty.

Handling is competent and the ride is luxurious until you get to some really choppy bitumen or dirt, when it starts to become harsh.

There's some well-credentialled competition in this five-seater luxo SUV class now, so the RX's prices, despite being trimmed in mid-2012, still look ambitious. The car itself is now dated, overpriced and off the pace as a drive, too.

Volvo's XC60, Audi's Q5, the Land Rover Freelander2/ Range Rover Evoque twins, Mercedes M Class and BMW's X3 give you comparable passenger space, bigger boots and a more interesting and entertaining set of engine choices, including diesels.

The RX450h hybrid is also available, priced from $82,900 for the Luxury, $89,900 for the F-Sport and $100,900 for the Sports Luxury.

It's a viable alternative to diesel and with an Australian standard test urban average of just 6.6L/100km, it's one of the most fuel-efficient SUVs you can buy for around town use.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★½
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
(RX450h: Five)	Value for money
Performance	★★☆☆☆
★★★☆☆	**Overall**
Handling	★★★☆☆
★★★☆☆	

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Lexus quality and reliability
- ✔ Lexus customer service
- ✔ Stylish cabin
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ The Hybrid gets great fuel economy around town

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Too expensive
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Small boot
- ✘ Underbraked

SPEX (RX350 Luxury)
- Made in Japan
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 204kW of power at 6200rpm/346Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.5 seconds
- 8.6L/100km highway; 14.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 254gkm
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, leather upholstery, dual-zone air, navigation with SUNA traffic alerts, reversing camera, digital radio, Bluetooth,alarm, power-operated tailgate, 18-inch alloy wheels, roof rails, xenon headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...
Audi Q5, BMW X3, Volvo XC60

LEXUS **IS** FROM **$56,500**



The 2015 Lexus IS range opens with the 153kW 2.5-litre V6 IS250, available in Luxury, F-Sport and Sports Luxury grades, priced at $56,500, $65,500 and $78,700 respectively.

The 233kW 3.6-litre V6 IS350 is available in the same grades, priced at $65,400, $73,600 and $84,800.

Hybrid power has now been added to the IS range with the IS300h, priced at $59,500 for the Luxury and $68,900 for the F Sport.

Lexus claims the IS300h "leaves diesel rivals behind" in reference to the diesel offerings in Audi's A4, BMW's 3 Series and the Mercedes C-Class lineups.

The Lexus petrol/electric drivetrain, which uses a 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine, develops 164kW, drives the IS to 100km/h in a respectable, if hardly sporty, 8.5 seconds and averages 4.9L/100km.

I haven't yet driven this or the IS250, however both petrol V6s are carried over from the previous model, and in that car the 2.5's lack of torque and deep thirst were particularly noticeable, especially against the stronger, more frugal turbopetrol fours offered by German rivals.

It's a similar story with the IS350, however this engine has several redeeming features, not the least of which is a potent, responsive and very tuneful top end, characteristic of a naturally aspirated six, and an eight-speed automatic that, in day-to-day driving, effectively compensates for its lack of lower midrange and bottom-end torque by unobtrusively picking the right gear most of the time.

It does get confused when you want to exploit the IS's performance on a tight road though. Lexus still does not properly understand what Sport means, and in this mode, or the sharper Sport+, the shifts are too late and/or too slow because of relatively dimwitted programming. Even when using the paddles, the transmission will also delay shifts if it thinks you don't know what you're doing.

BMW's eight-speed auto and Audi's S Tronic transmissions are faster, smoother, and much more in synch with your intentions when driving enthusiastically.

As with the previous IS, the car feels secure and agile, however it's still nose-heavy. Diving into a tight corner at speed sees prodigious understeer and intervention from the stability control, in part also because the Bridgestone Turanza tyres (on the IS350 F-Sport test car) aren't the stickiest in the world.

The steering itself is precise, if quite remote in feel, the ride (on the F-Sport's low-profile tyres) is slightly terse but tolerable, and the brakes are up to the job.

In the F-Sport you sit in a luxurious, fully-bolstered sports chair with sufficient travel to suit anyone and good vision around the car. The world's grooviest thin-film-transistor instruments are clear and informative, as are the main audio/communication/navigation menus on the main screen. There's not a lot of oddment storage at hand, though.

Legroom in the back seat is comparable with a 3 Series.

Boot space is adequate, there's a 60/40 split-fold rear-seat extension and a temporary spare.

The IS350 F-Sport has a strong price attraction against the likes of BMW's 335i and the Audi A4 3.0TFSi quattro, both of which cost $90,000-plus.

However the IS250 and 300h don't stack up well against their most direct rival, the new Infiniti Q50, which offers a genuine performance hybrid drivetrain and Mercedes-sourced four-cylinder turbodiesel and turbopetrol options.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Loaded and excellent value
- ✔ Rev-happy atmo six-power
- ✔ Outstanding quality, reliability and customer service
- ✔ Luxurious driver's seat
- ✔ Classy, functional dash layout

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Eight-speed is slower than the rest of the car
- ✘ Thirsty
- ✘ Understeer in tight corners
- ✘ Limited storage

SPEX (IS350 F SPORT)

- Made in Japan
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 233kW or power at 6400rpm/378Nm of torque at 4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.9 seconds (claimed)
- 7.4L/100km highway; 13.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 225gkm
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: 10 airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels with 225/40 (front) and 255/35 (rear) tyres, leather upholstery, Bluetooth with voice control, Mark Levinson audio, DAB+, navigation with SUNA traffic updates, reversing camera, blind spot monitor
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes C Class, Infiniti Q50, Volvo S60

MASERATI **GHIBLI** FROM **$138,900**



Look out Germany, because Italy has moved into your executive heartland. Maserati followers will tell you that the Ghibli represents either an evocative 1960s'-style GT coupe or a hodgepodge of misguided 1990s' muscle car madness.

But, in this century, the name that means a North African wind signifies the Fiat-owned and Ferrari-controlled firm's response to the Mercedes-Benz E/CLS, BMW 5/6 Series and Audi A6/A7.

Priced from $138,900, the Ghibli is the most affordable Maserati on the market, with the base model powered by a 3.0-litre twin turbo-diesel V6 producing 202kW of power and 600Nm of torque.

As with all Ghiblis, the diesel's rear wheels are driven via ZF's brilliant eight-speed automatic transmission with manual control and a limited slip differential.

Related to the engine used by Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Maserati oiler can hit 100km/h from standstill in 6.3 seconds while delivering a distinctly un-Maserati 5.9 litres per 100km.

Among the diesel's technologies are fuel-saving stop/start and an artificially enhanced exhaust note.

Of much more interest to traditionalists is the pair of Ferrari-designed and -built 3.0-litre twin-turbo petrol V6s.

The base petrol Ghibli, priced at $139,990, puts down 243kW at 5000rpm and 500Nm from 1750rpm, for a 0-100km/h run of 5.6s, before achieving an impressive 263km/h.

A number of upgrades (including different cam lobes, ECU and fuel injectors) up the ante considerably in the $169,900 Ghibli S, resulting in 301kW at 5500rpm and 550Nm from 4500rpm.

Consequently, the 0-100km/h time plummets to 5.0 seconds and 285km/h is possible, accompanied by a 0.8L/100km consumption rise (to 10.4L/100km combined).

Much of the Ghibli's underpinnings are based on the bigger Quattroporte's architecture. But, despite the part-aluminium body, the S weighs in at a hefty 1810kg, so its off-the-line performance is not as strong as the supercar badge suggests.

Once the revs build, however, the 5m-long sedan surges forward with impressive intent (and a blistering mechanical soundtrack), building up speed with delicious ferocity. Aided by absolutely seamless gear changes, the S's true character now emerges.

Maserati makes no bones about the hunkered-down firmness of the wishbone front and five-link rear suspension system, suggesting that its customers will expect a more visceral sensory experience than in a Benz.

That said, the ride on our optional 19-inch wheel setup (18s are standard) is surprisingly absorbent, though smaller bumps can regularly be felt — an electronic damper system is optional.

The Italians have fitted traditional hydraulic rather than new high-tech electric power steering to ensure class-leading feedback and feel, so the wheel does seem a tad heavy and remote at lower speeds.

But at highway velocities, the Ghibli's handling poise and precision are exemplary, backed up by exceptional grip and superbly powerful brakes. Only some road noise and exhaust tone intrusion in Sport mode upset the Maserati's dynamic accomplishments.

Heavily customisable, the cabin is both spacious and opulent, offering plenty of front-seat space, beautifully crafted materials, a fine driving position, sensibly executed ergonomics and storage options aplenty.

Even the cosy rear seat is more spacious than the sleek styling suggests, while the sizeable boot is enhanced by split-fold rear backrests. But a few buttons are awkward to reach, some rear-seat plastics aren't up to scratch, and a rattle was detected out back.

To validate quality, Maserati says the Ghibli underwent a five-year development regime that included more than six million kilometres of testing worldwide.

All models include navigation, a rear-view camera, bi-xenon headlights and keyless entry. However, adaptive cruise control is unavailable.

With the German brands becoming ever more ubiquitous, the Maserati Ghibli is well placed to lure buyers seeking something truly unique.

Mercedes, Audi and BMW ... you have been warned.

By Byron Mathioudakis

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
Not yet rated
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Sensuous, muscular styling
- ✔ Chassis poise and control
- ✔ Enjoyable steering feel
- ✔ Twin-turbo V6 petrol soundtrack
- ✔ It's not German

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Firm ride over rougher roads
- ✘ Steering's low-speed heaviness
- ✘ Twin-turbo V6's thirst when pushed
- ✘ Overweight
- ✘ Some rattles evident in test car
- ✘ Pricey

SPEX (Maserati Ghibli S)

- Made in Italy
- 3.0-litre V6 twin-turbo petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 301kW of power at 5500rpm/550Nm of torque at 4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.0 seconds (claimed)
- 7.3L/100km highway; 15.7L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 242g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, alarm, rear camera, 18-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, automatic bi-xenon headlights, sunroof, Bluetooth, navigation, side and rear window blinds
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Mercedes-Benz E/CLS, BMW 5/6 Series Gran Coupe, Audi A6/A7, Jaguar XF

MASERATI **QUATTROPORTE** FROM **$198,800**



Maserati's 2015 Quattroporte range features two petrol models, both powered by twin-turbo engines with an eight-speed ZF automatic as standard. The 3.0-litre V6 S, with 310kW/550Nm, costs $240,000; the 3.8-litre V8 GTS, driven here, is priced at $319,800.

The V8 produces 390kW and, with a full throttle overboost function, up to 710Nm.

It's as smooth, potent and elastic as a jet, but the symphonic wail of the previous GTS's Ferrari-sourced 4.7-litre V8 is gone, replaced by a bland turbo whoosh, a faint far away rumble under power and a polite blurt when you change gears.

With so much torque now available from idle, you also miss out on that insane, addictive top-end Ferrari rush, though a short stroke layout for the 3.8 does at least permit a healthy 7200rpm redline and the twin turbos are well able to accommodate it.

Compared with the previous GTS' aggressively calibrated six-speed transmission, shifts can be slow, unless you select Sport mode and use the paddles. In this mode, it's fast and smooth, so Sport becomes the default setting.

The Maserati hits 100km/h in just 4.7 seconds, yet returns a 20 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency and emissions.

On the launch drive, it averaged eights on the freeway and 15s in some fairly willing country road driving — impressive results for a 1900kg, 5.27-metre-long V8 sedan.

There's also a 202kW/600Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel, priced at $198,800. Do the words "Maserati" and "diesel" sit well together? Hmm...

The extended wheelbase does the Quattroporte no handling favours. A longer object takes more time to turn. No engineering alchemy can defeat that law.

Constant steering shake and a lack of front suspension travel severely compromise the Maserati's viability on rough local roads.

You can select Comfort or Sport mode for the dampers, however on either setting the front end transmits far too much road shock into the cabin.

On smooth bitumen, especially when a few sweeping corners are involved, the Maserati works. Hydraulic steering aims it precisely, immediately and with real, as opposed to virtual, responsiveness and feedback.

It's an inherently well-balanced car and hectares of Pirelli PZero footprint keep understeer and oversteer under control. You also have 20 pistons worth of Brembo's finest brakes underfoot.

The interior is a classic, conservative luxury sedan, with intuitive touch screen functionality plus a few graphics and switches borrowed from (say this very quietly) Jeep.

Despite its everything plus the steak knives price tag, Quattroporte is light on equipment, notably driver-assist safety systems.

There's no radar cruise, blind spot info, lane keeping, or emergency braking, seats are heated but not cooled, and the back doesn't even get its own air con.

You can option the back seat to a two- or three-person configuration.

As I drove the GTS back from the launch, in complete luxury and cocooned in a cone of silence, I realised that what I missed most about this car was its Italian-ness.

The previous Quattroporte GTS, especially the hard-case MC Sportline, had it in spades. That car had a lot of Ferrari engineering built in, so how could it not?

This model just feels more ... dare I say it ... German.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
Not rated
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Still looks Italian
- ✔ Potent twin-turbo V8 performance
- ✔ Good fuel efficiency
- ✔ Limo-like refinement
- ✔ Vast interior space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ It's lost the Ferrari connection
- ✘ Slow shifting auto
- ✘ Excessive steering shake
- ✘ Limited front-end travel
- ✘ Underequipped at the price

SPEX

- Made in Italy
- 3.8-litre twin-turbo V8 petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 390kW of power at 6800rpm/710Nm of torque from 2250-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.7 seconds (claimed)
- 8.5L/100km highway; 17.4L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 274gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, leather upholstery, 20-inch alloy wheels, rear camera, bi-xenon headlights, heated front seats, dual-zone air, navigation, DVD player, Bluetooth with audio streaming
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Audi A7/S7/RS7, Mercedes S Class, Porsche Panamera

MAZDA2 FROM $14,990



This is the all-new, third-generation version of Mazda's massively popular 2, targeted at first-time new car buyers, as well as "empty nesters" looking for a quality sub-compact five-door.

The five-door hatch, new-from-the-tyres-up 2015-model Mazda 2 is offered with a choice of two 1.5-litre, four-cylinder, naturally aspirated, direct-injection petrol engines across three spec levels: Neo, Maxx and Genki.

Pricing starts at a super-aggressive $14,990 for the Neo manual; Maxx manual is $16,990 and Genki manual is $19,990. A six-speed auto adds $2000.

All models are well equipped, and the Genki picks up the 3's MZD Connect connectivity system incorporating web access (via your device), Bluetooth and internet radio, with a sleek, tablet-style screen on top of the dash.

Automatic emergency braking (at speeds of 30km/h or less) is a $400 option.

Both engines benefit from Mazda's Skyactiv engine-efficiency technology, the standard (V-P5) version producing 79kW/139Nm, and the high-spec (F-P5) delivering 81kW/141Nm.

It may be a small difference in terms of output, but the real benefit comes in fuel economy. Mazda claims the F-P5 with six-speed auto consumes just 4.9L/100km on average, a massive 28 per cent gain over the outgoing model, while the standard V-P5 with six-speed manual consumes 5.4L/100km for a 15 per cent gain.

So the more powerful engine also consumes less fuel. Ain't technology wonderful? Especially when it runs on cheaper 91 octane too.

The high-spec engine features a higher compression ratio (13.0:1 vs 12.0:1), a 4-2-1 exhaust system for optimal combustion efficiency, and Mazda's i-stop (automatic stop-start) system.

As with other Mazda Skyactiv engines, the use of natural aspiration rather than turbocharging means that neither is particularly strong in terms of mid-range torque and you need to use a few revs to get along in style. That said, in a light car such as this, performance is entirely adequate.

One of the other big changes under the skin is a reworking of the rear torsion-beam suspension, aimed at improving ride comfort and reducing road noise. The electric power steering has also been tweaked with a faster ratio for more immediate response.

Genki is Japanese shorthand for enthusiastic and energetic, and the top-spec model rides on 16-inch alloy rims wearing 185/60 Dunlop Ecosave tyres, compared to 15s on the Maxx and (steel wheels on the) Neo, wearing the same width Dunlop rubber in 65-series profile. But despite the shorter aspect ratio, on the basis of our launch drive, the top-shelf model delivers the comfiest drive.

The strut-front, torsion-beam rear suspension set-up provides size-defying ride comfort, and the diminutive Mazda remains secure and stable in high-speed bends without sacrificing agility in tighter corners. The steering provides great road feel and the front seats match excellent lateral support with long-distance comfort.

No small car apart from Honda's Jazz gives you a truly spacious back seat or boot, but the Mazda2 is roomier than most on both counts and four average-sized adults can easily travel in comfort.

In terms of design, engineering, efficiency, reliability and quality, the Mazda2 is the new class leader. Sure, VW's Polo is more high-tech and refined, but it loses out to the Mazda because of VW's less-than-stellar quality and reliability. Still, you should compare the Mazda with the Polo, Honda's new Jazz, the Toyota Yaris and Kia Rio before making your decision.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Outstanding quality and reliability
- ✔ Overall refinement
- ✔ Passenger and cargo space
- ✔ Stellar fuel-efficiency
- ✔ Simple, classy dash layout

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Not a lot of grunt in either engine
- ✘ Rear headroom is just OK

SPEX (Maxx)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 81kW of power at 6000rpm/141Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.5 seconds (estimated)
- 4.2L/100km highway; 6.1L/100km city, 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 114g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Neo includes stability control, six airbags, Bluetooth with audio streaming, 15-inch steel wheels; Maxx adds high-spec engine, 15-inch alloys, cruise control, leather-trimmed steering wheel/gear-shift/handbrake; Genki adds 16-inch alloys, front fog lamps, rain-sensing wipers, automatic air, seven-inch display screen, six-speaker audio and navigation.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 65.8%; 5yr: 51.0%

compare with...

Honda Jazz, Kia Rio, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

MAZDA3 FROM $20,490



If we leave fleets out of the picture and look only at private customers who pay for their cars with cold, hard, non-tax deductible cash, the Mazda3 is Australia's most popular car.

Why? It delivers what Australian car buyers want: value for money, outstanding quality and reliability, fuel efficiency, conservative yet expressive design and five star safety. The fact that the Mazda argues with the VW Golf for best drive in class status is the icing on the cake.

Available as a sedan and hatch, base models are powered by the 114kW 2.0-litre naturally aspirated petrol Skyactiv-G engine, kicking off at $20,490 for the Neo; the Maxx is $24,990 and the Touring is $25,490.

The SP25 line runs the same 138kW 2.5-litre Skyactiv-G engine used in the Mazda 6. SP25 prices start at $25,890; the SP25 GT is $30,590.

The Astina nameplate, last seen here on the 2003 Mazda 323, is applied to the top spec SP25 model, tested here, which costs $36,190.

The XD Astina hatch runs a 129kW/420Nm 2.2-litre Skyactic diesel, which averages 5.0L/100km and costs $40,230.

A six-speed manual is standard on all models; a six-speed automatic adds $2000.

In choosing to go non-turbo with Skyactiv, both petrol engines miss out on the strong surge of midrange torque you get from forced induction. The payoff, assisted by slippery aerodynamics and the six-speed auto's preference for the higher gears, is frugal fuel numbers on 91 octane, rather than the expensive premium preferred by turbo-powered rivals.

Light, tight and delicately balanced, the Mazda 3 is so well sorted it almost seems to drive itself. Sure, it's not hot-hatch agile and the steering isn't the sharpest around, but that's because the 3 doesn't pretend to be a performance car. The ride is comfortable and Mazda's often complained about noise, vibration and harshness issues are now non-issues.

What really seals the deal for the 3, and will undoubtedly see Mazda's run of success continue, is its spacious, high-quality, stylish interior.

The Astina SP25 might seem pricey at around $36,000, but it's loaded with gear. I was driving a $60,000 Audi S3 in the same week and, jumping from one to the other, the impression was that both cars should have cost about the same.

The Mazda has a high-tech BMW i-Drive-style smartphone-connective infotainment system, with rich, clear graphics on the tablet screen, plus the latest active safety features, including radar cruise, automatic emergency braking and blind spot warning.

The Astina's driver's seat is firm, well bolstered and supportive and the dash is efficiently organised. Need-to-know stuff, including a digital speedo, is in front of you; the rest is on the centre stack. A height-adjustable head-up display is projected through a pop-up screen.

The Mazda's rear seat is spacious and comfortable, with a wide, flat cushion, plenty of headroom and Isofix plus conventional restraint anchors. Boot space in the sedan is generous, though the opening is quite small. A temporary spare is under the floor.

The Mazda3 and VW Golf lead this competitive class, with the Toyota Corolla keeping them honest. If you want the best small car, test drive each, make your choice, and you can't go wrong.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Made-in-Japan quality and reliability
- ✔ Fuel-efficient engines on 91 octane
- ✔ Spacious, stylish, comfortable cabin
- ✔ Responsive, secure dynamics and comfortable ride
- ✔ High-tech infotainment and safety features
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Engines lack turbo-style torque
- ✘ Small kids in the back can't see out
- ✘ Temporary spare

SPEX (SP25 ASTINA)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 138kW of power at 5700rpm/250Nm of torque at 3250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7 seconds (claimed)
- 4.9L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 141g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Astina includes six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, Bose sound, bi-xenon headlights, head-up display, 18-inch alloys, sunroof, radar cruise, blind spot information, automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning and rear cross traffic alert
- Redbook future values: TBA

compare with...

Hyundai i30, Honda Civic hatch, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

MAZDA6 FROM $33,460

CARS OF THE YEAR WINNER



Mazda's mid-size 6 is available as a sedan and wagon. Prices start at $33,460 for the 138kW 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic Sport sedan. The Touring is $37,500, the GT is $43,220 and the top-of-the-range Atenza is $47,210. Wagon versions add $1300.

Mazda's 129kW 2.2-litre turbodiesel engine, also with a six-speed auto, adds an extra $2850 to Touring, GT and Atenza sedan and wagon.

The 2.5-litre petrol is the pick of the engines. Whereas most naturally-aspirated petrol fours, including Mazda's 2.0-litre, just don't have the bottom-end and midrange performance of their turbocharged rivals, the 2.5 is sufficiently strong and responsive across the rev range to work nicely in town or on the highway, aided by the Mazda's relatively light weight and well-chosen gearing in the automatic. It's also exceptionally smooth and fuel efficient, with the added bonus that it runs fine on regular unleaded.

The 2.2 turbodiesel is also a strong engine, with a hefty 420Nm of torque at 2000rpm. Under acceleration, however, it is noticeably coarser and noisier than the petrol, its turbocharged power delivery is less linear, and any advantage in terms of fuel efficiency will probably be negated by the considerably higher price of diesel anyway.

The ride/handling compromise on the Touring models, with 17-inch alloys and 225/55 tyres, is just about perfect for our road conditions. It absorbs rough surfaces smoothly and quietly at any speed, yet on the open road delivers composure and stability. This 6 is less sporty than its predecessor, though, so it's more nose heavy in tight corners and its electric power steering is less precise and tactile. The brakes could use more bite, too.

I also briefly drove an Atenza diesel sedan with 19-inch wheels and 225/45 tyres. The ride on this model was much harsher around town. I'd hazard a guess it would be a similar story on B-grade country roads, where road noise would probably be greater, too.

Mazda has taken a simple, elegant, formal approach to the cabin, with passing homage to Audi's control layouts, notably in the operation of the screen-based navigation/audio/communications system. Materials, fit and finish quality are as good as many $100,000 cars.

The leather-wrapped driver's seat (standard in all grades except Sport) is supportive and comfortable, with power lumbar adjustment. If you like an upright backrest, though, you may find the protruding head restraint intrusive.

The wagon's wheelbase is slightly shorter than the sedan's, but in both there's reasonable back-seat space for most adults.

The sedan's boot has a long, high floor and a 60/40-split fold rear seat back.

The wagon's load area offers just 23 litres greater volume and is small by class standards due to the low roof and tapered rear end, though its extended floor is an almost flat 1.85 metres. You have to watch your head on the low tailgate. A clever integrated load cover and a couple of bag hooks are included, plus a temporary spare.

Mazda's previous 6 was generally recognised as the best drive in the mid-size class and although this model has lost some of its predecessor's sporty character and become, shall we say, more mature, it's still an example of Japanese car making at its finest — well priced and generously equipped, with reasonable performance, outstanding quality, refinement and comfort.

Touring specification is the sweet spot for value and the pick of the mid-size class.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Unbeatable Made in Japan quality and reliability
- ✔ Smooth, clean, frugal 2.5-litre
- ✔ Loaded with gear
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✔ Compliant ride and secure handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ The 6 used to be sorta sporty. Now it's not
- ✘ The bigger the wheels, the harsher the ride
- ✘ Audio system doesn't remember where you were in your iPod music menu between drives
- ✘ Smallish boot in the wagon

SPEX (2.5 Touring)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 138kW of power at 5700rpm/250Nm of torque at 3250rpm
- 0-100km/h approx 8 seconds
- 5.4L/100km highway; 8.8L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 155g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 17-inch alloy wheels, navigation, reversing camera, dual-zone air, Bluetooth, Bose sound, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Holden Malibu, Hyundai i40, Peugeot 508, VW Passat

MAZDA **CX5** FROM **$27,880**

CARS OF THE YEAR WINNER



Mazda's CX5 shot straight to the top of the class sales charts on its introduction in 2012.

It's built to the best "Made in Japan" quality standards, has rock-solid resale values, a strong safety résumé, plenty of standard equipment, and a choice of fuel-efficient petrol and turbodiesel engines.

The 2.0-litre petrol front-wheel-drive CX5 range opens with the Maxx six-speed manual at $27,880. A six-speed auto adds $2000 and is standard on all other models.

The 2.0-litre Maxx Sport is $33,620. All-wheel-drive CX5s get the 2.5-litre engine and a six-speed auto. The Maxx is $32,880, Maxx Sport is $36,620, Grand Touring is $44,180 and Akera is $46,570.

The 2.2-litre turbodiesel AWD Maxx Sport is $39,470, while the Grand Touring is $47,030 and Akera is $49,420. The 2.0-litre and 2.5-litre naturally-aspirated petrol engines use direct injection, a high compression ratio and automatic stop/start to achieve some of the lowest fuel numbers in the class, on regular unleaded rather than premium, as with other fuel misers such as the VW Tiguan.

However, the 2.0-litre lacks power and torque and with 1.5-1.6 tonnes to shift, its performance is extremely lethargic and unresponsive.

I've driven the 2.5-litre engine/six-speed auto drivetrain in the Mazda6 wagon, where it's got a similar mass to move and does so much more convincingly than the 2.0-litre. It's no ball of fire, but it's got 52Nm greater torque than the 2.0-litre and in the bottom half of the rev range the 2.5 is pretty strong for an atmo petrol engine. It also returns outstanding fuel numbers and is extremely smooth and quiet.

The 2.2 turbodiesel has 420Nm of torque — more than twice as much as the 2.0 petrol and 170Nm more than the 2.5 petrol.

It pulls like a train, there's a complete absence of turbo lag and a willingness to rev harder and smoother than its rivals all the way to 5000 rpm, at least 500rpm past the point at which most turbodiesels are gasping.

Dynamics are safe, very secure on rough surfaces and more enjoyable than your average compact SUV, although there's plenty of built-in understeer and the steering itself, though light and precise, is surprisingly indirect. The ride is absorbent and quiet on any surface.

The interior is beautifully finished, there's clear vision around the car, a comfortable driver's seat, plenty of storage, and even the base-model Maxx gets a touch screen with USB and Bluetooth, with audio streaming, voice activated dialling and message reading, plus a rear camera, tyre pressure monitoring and keyless starting.

Rear seat access is easy via wide-opening doors, there's ample legroom and a firm, comfortable seat.

A big boot maximises volume with a squared-off shape.

If you're after a turbodiesel, the Mazda CX5 is easily the pick of the class; in petrol territory, it's a close run thing between the 2.5-litre/automatic CX5 and the 2.5-litre/CVT Subaru Forester.



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety (ANCAP)
★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆ (2.2 diesel: ★★★★☆)
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ "Made in Japan" quality
- ✔ Great resale values
- ✔ Class leading turbodiesel
- ✔ Well-equipped
- ✔ Fuel-efficient engines

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ 2.0 petrol engine is a slug
- ✘ Auto is reluctant to kick down
- ✘ Slow steering
- ✘ Temporary spare

SPEX (2.5 auto Maxx Sport)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 138kW of power at 6000rpm/250Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.3L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO^2 emissions are 172g/km
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Maxx includes stability control, six airbags, 17-inch steel wheels, rear camera, Bluetooth, USB, tyre pressure monitoring. Maxx Sport adds alloy wheels, navigation, 17-inch alloys and parking sensors. Grand Touring adds sunroof, leather upholstery and 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 48%

compare with...

Honda CRV, Hyundai ix35, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4

Search multiple vehicles at a time

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

MAZDA **CX9** FROM **$44,525**



Mazda's big seven-seater CX9 is available with front-wheel drive and all-wheel drive. The base model Classic front-wheel drive is $44,525 and the Luxury version is $52,980. The all-wheel-drive Luxury is $57,480 and the top spec Grand Touring is $63,003. A 204kW 3.7-litre petrol V6 does the honours, with a standard six-speed sequential automatic.

It has plenty of power and it goes hard from about 4500rpm, but that's of limited value in real world driving and expensive at the pump, though at least it runs on regular unleaded.

The CX9 is a hefty and not particularly sophisticated truck.

The 20-inch wheels on the Luxury do little other than add unsprung mass, which lessens suspension control and increases noise on rough roads.

Big wheels, low-profile tyres and firm springs also make the ride more fussy and jiggly than it should be, especially when driving around town.

The CX9 does have the most spacious, versatile interior in this class, beating its closest rival — Toyota's Kluger — for back-seat room and overall cabin length.

Kids enter the Mazda's back seat via the easy fold-and-slide 40-split section of the middle row from the safety of the passenger side and the kerb, unlike some rivals.

There is 160mm of travel for the middle row so it can be positioned to provide reasonable legroom for all passengers.

The boot has a low floor and with all seats in use, you still get enough space for the school bags and some shopping.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality, reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Outstanding quality
- ✔ Ample space for all seats
- ✔ Loaded with safety features
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Suspension needs work
- ✘ 20-inch alloys look good but that's all
- ✘ V6 is thirsty and lacks torque
- ✘ High CO^2 emissions
- ✘ Space-saver spare

SPEX (Luxury AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 3.7-litre V6-petrol/six-speed sequential automatic/on-demand all-wheel drive
- 204kW of power at 6250rpm and 367Nm of torque at 4250rpm
- 0–100km/h in 9.3 seconds
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 9.3L/100km highway; 17.1L/100km city; 91 octane. CO^2 emissions are 291g/km
- Standard (Classic): Six airbags, stability control, three-zone automatic air conditioning, automatic headlights, rain-sensing wipers, 18-inch alloys, reversing camera, tinted glass
- Luxury adds leather upholstery, 20-inch alloys, Bose sound and power-adjustable heated front seats; Grand Touring adds blind spot monitoring, lane departure warning and side traffic warning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Toyota Kluger

Any set of wheels — check out these subscription steals!



Check out the new universal SHOP for the latest offers and freebies!

MERCEDES **A-CLASS** FROM **$35,600**



The Mercedes-Benz A-Class starts at $35,600 for the 90kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive A180. It's then a big hike to the A200, at $41,400, with a more powerful 115kW version of the 1.6-litre engine, as tested here.

The A200 CDi 100kW 1.8-litre turbodiesel is also priced at $41,900.

The A250 Sport, with a 155kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol and lots of AMG bling sells for $50,400.

The A45 AMG, priced at $74,900, is the hot rod of the range. Its 265kW 2.0-litre is the most powerful turbopetrol engine in the world, so all-wheel drive is employed. See the CLA45 AMG test on page 97 for more details.

While the A-Class is giving Audi, BMW, Volvo and VW some serious competition for their A3, 1 Series, V40 and Golf, it's worth noting that, as with the previous A Class, you don't get the same levels of refinement, comfort, quality or on-road excellence in this small Mercedes that you do in the larger models.

Test drive an A-Class back to back with a C-Class, for example, and you will think they were made by two different companies. The same does not apply to Audi's A3, BMW's 1 Series or Volvo's V40. These cars have their parents' and larger siblings' brand DNA clearly evident in their characters.

The A-Class sits at the large end of the hatchback class. It's a beautiful-looking thing, especially with the A200's stylish 18-inch alloy wheels.

The 1.6 delivers solid shove across a wide rev range, even in Eco mode, and has a pleasantly willing character. It's also clean and fuel efficient.

The seven-speed shift lever is on the right of the steering column. It features Sport and Manual modes and has a twin-clutch instead of a torque convertor, but its shifts can be typically Mercedes slow and inconsistent at times. Auto stop/start is fitted.

The A200 is firmly suspended and attacks a corner like a good sporty hatch should, with minimal body roll, sharp steering and plenty of grip, however it's not a happy traveller on rough roads. The body cops a bashing on bumps, which can also induce a variety of squeaks and rattles in the cabin. The ride can also be harsh, in part a consequence of the low-profile runflat tyres now fitted, and at times there is some steering kickback.

The cabin is new-age Mercedes, a stylish, interesting mix of retro and futuristic design. Most of it works, but the audio/communication/navigation system is complex and clumsy.

Mercedes doesn't compromise on safety. Radar-based collision mitigation, Pre-Safe, nine airbags and a camera are standard, along with parking sensors and self parking.

The pseudo-racing, shell-style, fake-leather/cloth-upholstered driver's seat is comfortable and supportive, with long travel. If you like the seat back upright, you will find the non-adjustable integral head restraint annoyingly protrusive.

Four average-sized adults will fit OK in the A-Class. The back seat is firm and comfortable; two ISOFIX and conventional restraint anchors are provided.

There's no spare so the useful boot has a deep well and the seat backs flip forward for an extended flat floor.

The A200 has its attractions, but at the circa $40K pricepoint I think there's better value, refinement, comfort and dynamic prowess elsewhere. VW's Golf is the obvious place, but BMW's 118i and Volvo's V40T4 are also more than capable rivals.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Very cool, inside and out
- ✔ Unbeatable safety qualifications
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ Fun to drive on smooth roads
- ✔ Punchy, frugal 1.6 turbopetrol

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Hard ride on rough roads
- ✘ Run-flat tyres
- ✘ Squeaks and rattles in the cabin
- ✘ Protruding head restraint on driver's seat
- ✘ Resale values aren't great

SPEX (A200)

- Made in Germany
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 5300rpm/250Nm of torque from 1250-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.3 secs (claimed)
- 5.2L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 141gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloys with 225/40 tyres, reversing camera, collision prevention assist, automatic parking, front and rear parking sensors, Pre Safe, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB connector
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Audi A3, BMW 1 Series, Volvo V40, VW Golf

MERCEDES **B-CLASS** FROM **$40,900**



The second-generation Mercedes B Class sticks firmly to the kid carrier brief, offers high-tech fuel-efficient engines and affordable prices.

The range opens with the B180 Blue Efficiency, priced at $40,900, with a 90kW/200Nm 1.6-litre turbopetrol engine. A seven-speed automated manual transmission is standard on all B Class variants.

The same engine is offered with 115kW/250Nm in the B200 Blue Efficiency, priced at $45,900.

The B200CDi, with a 1.8-litre turbodiesel tuned for 100kW/300Nm, is $46,400.

The 155kW/350Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol B250 is $50,400.

The B-Class is designed and engineered with family-friendly pragmatism, comfort and fuel efficiency uppermost in mind, so it has to be approached in this context. The B200 Blue Efficiency (tested) is hardly a sparkling, energetic performer, and the seven-speed's slow, unresponsive operation can be pretty frustrating, but both characteristics are a fact of life in quite a few of today's petrol drivetrains, where performance has been blunted to get the required low fuel numbers.

That said, once you get the hang of how the B200's drivetrain management works, it gets around town easily enough and cruises adequately on the highway as well.

Fuel economy, albeit on 95 octane premium, is pretty good. The official test numbers are in the Spex at right; on the road, I got 8-10L/100km in town (where automatic stop/start helps the cause) and 6-7L/100km on the highway.

The wand-style gear selector has its pros and cons, but it's great when you're manoeuvring in tight spaces. So is light electromechanical steering and a tight turning circle. And so is automatic hands-free reverse parking, now standard.

Handling is fine for a short, tall box, and the ride is quite comfortable. The upright driving position is complemented by generous seat height adjustment, which shorter drivers will appreciate because the B-Class feels bigger and bulkier than it actually is.

The interior is a refreshing update from Mercedes, mixing its established formal design elements with improved fit and finish quality and more flair, particularly the classy retro-look vents and a tablet-style display screen on top of the dash.

The B-Class needs a rear-view camera, but in other respects it's as safe as a small wagon can be. It includes a radar-based system that reads the road ahead and gives you a dash light, then a loud warning if you're about to whack another car's rear end. Unlike Volvo's system, which can stop the car if you're still not getting the message, you have to respond and hit the brakes. The B-Class is narrow, so the back seat is only suitable for two kids in restraints.

Its flat shape makes fitting these easy, using Isofix or tether strap anchors on the back. Older kids and most adults get ample legroom.

The boot has a low, wide floor that's easy to load and has enough acreage for all the junk you need to carry when you're moving young kids around. It extends to a big space using the 60/40 split-fold rear-seat backs.

There's no spare; the B-Class uses runflat tyres.

The B-Class is far from perfect and there are many lower-priced and similarly family-friendly wagons around.

However, it does offer the reassurance, every time your kids get in, that should the worst happen you have the world's best safety engineering on your side.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Works beautifully as a two-kid carrier
- ✔ Comfortable, stylish cabin
- ✔ Mercedes' safety engineering
- ✔ Tidy handling and comfortable ride
- ✔ Good value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Slow, unresponsive seven-speed transmission
- ✘ Needs a rear camera
- ✘ No spare
- ✘ Servicing and other running costs won't be cheap

SPEX (B200)

- Made in Germany
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 5300rpm; 250Nm of torque from 1250-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.4 seconds (claimed)
- 4.9L/100km highway; 8.1L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 141gkm
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB connector, 17-inch alloy wheels, rain-sensing wipers, automatic parking assist and fake leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

BMW X1, Peugeot 3008, VW Golf, Volvo V40

MERCEDES **CLA CLASS** FROM **$49,900**



The Mercedes CLA Class is essentially the front-wheel-drive A-Class with a different body, in this case a four-door coupe. It's the most aerodynamically-efficient production car body in the world, a significant factor in minimising fuel use and wind noise.

It's fractionally longer but also narrower than the C-Class rear-drive sedan, which has tighter rear-seat legroom too.

CLA prices open at $49,900 for the CLA200. That's thousands cheaper than a base-model C-Class sedan.

The CLA200, tested here, runs a 115kW 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine/seven-speed automatic.

The CLA200CDi, with a 100kW 1.8-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel, is priced at $50,400.

The CLA250 Sport 4MATIC, with a 155kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol and all-wheel drive, is priced at $64,900. It gets lots of lovely AMG kit, including bespoke 18-inch alloys, sports seats in leather, a sunroof, a 10kW overboost feature, sports suspension and steering. The 250 Sport is not a worksburger AMG car — that's the CLA45 AMG tested next door — so think of it as being similar to BMW's M Performance intermediate grade models.

As the cooking model in the range, the CLA200's 1.6-litre engine isn't going to take your breath away, but it does the job with smooth, responsive, accessible performance readily available, plus crisp, timely shifts from the seven-speed automatic — a twin-clutch design that avoids the abruptness and hesitation on take off that afflicts VW/Audi's twin-clutch seven-speeder. Shift paddles are standard.

The 200's suspension is too hard given its relatively humble position in the pecking order. It almost feels as though it's tuned as the performance model. The same applies to its quite aggressive 225/40 18 run-flat tyre specification.

So while the car offers ability, enjoyment and grip on smoothly-surfaced corners, and steers with precision, it's also less compliant and comfortable than it should be, like its A-Class sibling. The ride becomes harsh on moderately rough surfaces, which also induce excessive suspension and tyre noise plus the occasional creak and squeak in the cabin.

Here, it's virtually identical to the A-Class. There's ample front-seat travel and a cosy cockpit, so you sit in the car almost like a pukka sportster. Interfaces are a bit fiddly, particularly the navigation, which couldn't quite keep up with our progress at times on the test drive, and air-conditioning controls, buried too low on the dash and indistinctly marked.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

CLA gets plenty of safety and convenience technology as standard, including collision prevention assist, which will warn you and automatically maximise braking performance to help avoid rear-ending another car, plus lane keeping, blind spot assist and automatic parking.

Rear-seat legroom is fine for most adults, but headroom is tight and the seat too narrow to realistically accommodate three. The boot's a whopper, given the car's relatively compact dimensions.

The CLA200 is an engaging, interesting effort from Mercedes, but ultimately not quite as polished as a $50,000 Mercedes should be. If you're expecting something similar to a C-Class, it's not. In fact the two cars could not be more different, with the C Class offering superior performance, comfort, quality and refinement for its extra asking price.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Sharp, distinctive styling
- ✔ Sporty dynamics
- ✔ Comfortable driving position
- ✔ Big boot
- ✔ Frugal, torquey 1.6

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Suspension and tyre noise
- ✘ Squeaks and rattles in the cabin
- ✘ Slow navigation

SPEX (CLA200)
- Made in Hungary
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 5300rpm/250Nm of torque from 1250-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.6 seconds (claimed)
- 4.8L/100km highway; 7.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 133gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, automatic stop/start, fake leather upholstery, Bluetooth with audio streaming, iPod/iPhone integration, dual-zone air, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors, collision prevention assist, lane keeping, blind spot assist and automatic parking
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Audi A3, BMW 316i, Lexus is250, Infiniti Q50, Volvo S60

MERCEDES **CLA45 AMG** FROM **$86,900**



As with its lesser brethren, the top-of-the-range Mercedes CLA45 AMG shares its architecture, underpinnings and specification with the A45 AMG hatchback.

Priced at $86,900, its $12,000 more expensive than the five-door, which doesn't quite compute given that CLA's larger boot and its coupe profile are the only differences. Still, it's a proud, if completely irrational, tradition in motoring that coupes are always expensive.

Both AMG 45s run a long-stroke 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbopetrol four-cylinder engine with 265kW, making it the most powerful series production four in the world. It also produces up to 450Nm of torque.

Power goes to the road via AMG's Speedshift seven-speed transmission — which has three shift maps including manual — which allows the engine full rein and delivers the fastest gear changes. Launch control is also provided.

All-wheel drive — 4MATIC in Benz speak — is fitted because sending these sorts of numbers to the front wheels, as with other A/CLA variants, just wouldn't work. An electrohydraulic clutch on the rear differential can send up to 50 per cent of the engine's torque to the rear wheels; default drive is to the fronts. Three ESP settings are provided, and under power in corners the inside rear wheel is automatically braked to keep the car nicely turned in.

AMG sports suspension with thicker anti-roll bars, AMG-tuned electromechanical steering, large-diameter vented, cross-drilled discs with four-piston front calipers and beautiful AMG alloys with 235/35 19 tyres complete the chassis package.

The 2.0-litre engine offers outstanding responsiveness, flexibility and refinement, all the way from idle to its 6250rpm redline. You can pootle around town all day, where it's docile and frugal, but as a performance engine it is impossible to fault.

The sports exhaust isn't too loud; even with its variable exhaust flap fully open, it's a gently throaty, slightly rattly note.

The seven-speed is fine, but not quite as fast or intuitive as its Porsche, Audi/VW or BMW (eight-speed) rivals. It's fairly conservative in granting downshifts in manual mode, which is no great problem because even in the higher gears you just lean on the accelerator and the car launches hard out of any corner.

Dynamics are superb. There's none of the expected nose heaviness or understeer often inherent with all-wheel drive and AMG has not overtyred the car either, so while there's almost unlimited grip, it's also wonderfully agile, tactile and responsive to your wishes. The brakes are outstanding.

The CLA remains planted, comfortable and quiet even on fairly rough surfaces. In this regard it's superior to the A45 hatch and also to the base CLA200, which is oversprung, harsh and noisy. The CLA45 is sufficiently compliant and refined to make long drives, or the daily commute, a pleasure.

The cabin is as per the CLA200 described on page 96, with some classy AMG extras. These include comfortable, supportive, race-shell-style sports seats upholstered in premium leather, a beautiful, lightweight AMG steering wheel with paddles, faux carbon fibre and real brushed-aluminium trim, worksburger Harman Kardon audio/navigation system with digital radio and voice control, and Distronic Plus, which incorporates cruise control/collision-sensing radar and can apply automatic emergency braking at speeds up to 200km/h.

The CLA45 AMG is an absolute screamer, right up there with the best performance cars, irrespective of price. Yet it's also practical, comfortable and easy to live with. Highly recommended.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★★★
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★½



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ One of the best performance cars you can buy
- ✔ Wonderful engine
- ✔ Balanced, engaging dynamics
- ✔ Excellent ride comfort given its performance brief
- ✔ Stylish and well equipped
- ✔ As safe as they come

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ A few squeaks and creaks in the cabin
- ✘ Transmission's not quite as fast or intuitive as the rest of the car
- ✘ Fiddly infotainment controls
- ✘ No spare

SPEX

- Made in Hungary
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/seven-speed dual-clutch automatic/all-wheel drive
- 265kW of power at 6000rpm/450Nm of torque from 2250-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.6 seconds (claimed)
- 5.9L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 164gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: As per CLA200, plus 19-inch alloys with 235/35 tyres, AMG instruments, body kit, sports seats, steering wheel, brakes, exhaust, transmission and suspension, HDD navigation, 10gb music storage, DAB+, Harman Kardon audio, Distronic Plus
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Audi S4, BMW 335i, Volvo S60T6

MERCEDES **GLA CLASS** FROM **$47,900**



The Mercedes GLA SUV range starts at $47,900 for the 100kW 2.1-litre turbodiesel, front-wheel-drive GLA200 CDI. Opt for the sportier performance and all-wheel-drive grip of the 155kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol GLA250 and the price rises to $57,900. The 265kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol all-wheel-drive GLA45 AMG hotrod costs $79,900.

The performance spread ranges from sedate to sensational. The diesel-powered GLA200 reaches triple figures around 10 seconds after launch. That's slow, but comparable with a BMW X1 18d and Audi's base Q3 2.0 TDI, though the Benz has an edge in fuel consumption.

The GLA 250 is in a different league altogether: 7.1 seconds. It is an impressive number put into perspective by responsive, idle to redline, real-world performance.

The GLA45 AMG hits 100km/h just 4.8 seconds after take-off — the same claimed time as the ferocious ML63 AMG — but it is the always-there roll-on acceleration and accompanying snap and crackle from the exhaust that marks this as one of the most enjoyable, potent performance SUVs around.

Transmission is a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic with standard Eco, Sports and Manual modes. All-wheel-drive 4Matic in Mercedes-speak — models use an on-demand all-wheel-drive system that drives the front wheels in normal, dry conditions and can transfer up to 50 per cent of torque to the rear wheels when required.

The GLA250 is equipped with an off-road mode that adjusts the throttle, gear changes and traction/stability control system for driving on loose surfaces. It also has a "Downhill Speed Regulation" switch to manually set the speed when descending. You can then control the rate of descent, using the cruise control stalk to adjust the pace in 1km/h increments.

Comfort suspension in the non-AMG models is as well modulated as any Mercedes sedan, delivering a great balance between ride comfort and handling. Stabiliser bars help contain, though not eliminate, body gyrations around corners and the steering is typically Mercedes — indirect just off centre before transitioning into immediate, precise response from the front wheels.

The lower, tauter GLA45 AMG sports suspension absorbs rather than absolves small road irregularities. It's a welcome trade-off/trait in a vehicle with this much cornering capacity and operates in concert with speed-sensitive steering that transfers details on road camber and condition directly into the driver's hands.

If you've seen inside an A-Class or CLA sedan, the GLA will hold no surprises beyond the fact that the sit-down-and-in seating position in those cars is changed in favour of a higher hip-point SUV-style driving position, well-sculpted front seats and relatively spacious rear legroom, making this a comfortable cruiser for four adults.

Above the waistline the GLA looks, feels and is finished like a Benz, but the plastics on the lower front fascia and between the seats don't exude the quality look and feel found in more prestigious Benz models, while Mercedes' infotainment system lacks the functionality, clarity and sophistication of rivals such as BMW's iDrive.

Open the powered tailgate and the low, wide floor can accommodate plenty of cargo. The rear seat folds forward in a 60/40 split to extend capacity further.

Mercedes is late to the compact SUV party, but in the GLA it looks to have established the new benchmark. If you're shopping the class, drive this first and see how the others measure up.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
Not yet rated
Performance
★★★½☆ (GLA200)
★★★★☆ (GLA250)
★★★★½ (GLA45)
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★½
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Taut, responsive chassis
- ✔ Outstanding turbo petrol engines
- ✔ Roomy, comfortable cabin
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Sharp pricing and specification

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Diesel noise under acceleration
- ✘ Some cheap interior plastics
- ✘ Restricted rear vision
- ✘ Dated infotainment system

SPEX (GLA250)

- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 155kW of power at 5500rpm/350Nm of torque from 1200-4000rpm.
- 0-100km/h in 7.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 151gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, bi-xenon headlamps, active parking assist, Bluetooth, blind spot assist, reversing camera and artificial leather upholstery. GLA250 adds 19-inch wheels, directional lighting and a sunroof. GLA45 AMG adds sports seats and replaces the steering column-mounted transmission lever with a square-topped shifter residing in its rightful place in the centre console
- Redbook future values: Not yet available, but they will be strong.

compare with...

Audi Q3, BMW X1, Volvo V40 Cross Country

MERCEDES **C-CLASS** FROM **$60,900**



Now in its fifth iteration, the 2015 W205 Mercedes-Benz C-Class, priced from $60,900 for the C200, is as large as its big-brother E-Class was just two generations ago.

Yet it is the S-Class flagship that has provided inspiration for today's BMW 3 Series rival, with similarly aero-crafted styling that imbues the Benz with real road presence.

However, it's the W205's S-Class-style interior presentation that's the C-Class showstopper. Gone is the W204's functional but industrial-grade aesthetic, replaced by a warm and inviting ambience brimming with quality textures and high-tech controls.

The basics are also (mostly) sorted, from the firm, supportive seats and spacious surrounds up front and much-needed greater rear legroom, to the superb driving position and clear, informative instrumentation.

On the downside, some wind noise and trim rattles were detected in the test cars. The W205 C-Class that we get is built in South Africa, as was the trouble-prone 2000-2007 W203 model. The 2007-2014 W204 was sourced from Germany and in both perception and reality, its quality and reliability were markedly superior to the W203. Let's hope the W205 is the same.

The 135kW/300Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic C200 drivetrain is a sweet and punchy performer, though it does require a forceful right foot to really hustle along.

Agility Select allows you to adjust the engine/transmission operation over five settings. Only heavy loads or hilly terrain expose the base car's modest outputs. The 0-100km/h trip takes 7.3 seconds, which is respectable.

From $68,900, the 155kW/350Nm C250 variant (the same drivetrain with a different chip) injects that extra bit off oomph for effortless overtaking, improving off-the-line performance significantly for a 0-100km/h time of 6.6 seconds, while delivering exactly the same 6.0L/100 km fuel consumption average as the C200.

However, for now, the most effortless real-world slogger is the $70,400 C250 BlueTEC, thanks to a 150kW/500Nm 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engine that is as quick against the clock to 100km/h as the C250, but can return as little as 4.5L/100km.

Both C250s also include leather upholstery, adaptive cruise control, keyless entry and starting, 19-inch alloys and tinted glass.

For the first time, a diesel/electric C-Class is heading our way. The $74,900 C300 BlueTEC Hybrid uses the same 2.2-litre CDI/electric motor drivetrain as the bigger E300 Hybrid to slash consumption to just 3.8L/100km.

The $62,400 C200 BlueTEC brandishes the smallest engine in the series' 30-year career in Australia — a 100kW/300Nm 1.6-litre turbo-diesel — to offer a 4.0L/100km return. It lands early in 2015.

Riding on MacPherson struts up front and a five-link rear suspension setup, the W205 is stronger but lighter than the W204, with direct electric steering, sharp handling, composed roadholding and a ride that is mostly supple — bar a bit of firmness detected over bumpier surfaces.

A major feat, Benz's engineers have combined BMW sportiness with Lexus levels of refinement.

The C-Class wagon, available in all variants bar the C300 Hybrid, carries a $2500 price premium over the equivalent sedan, while the high-flying AMG models blast in midway through 2015.

It is unlikely this best ever Mercedes C-Class will relinquish its best in class medium-luxury segment title anytime soon. Such is the C Class's dominance that BMW's 3 Series and Audi's A4 don't even get a look in now.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★★☆

Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Sumptuous, roomy cabin
- ✔ Punchy, frugal performance across the range
- ✔ Handling poise and control
- ✔ Class-leading safety technology
- ✔ VMini S-Class look and feel

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Auto gear selector on steering column
- ✘ Some rattles and wind noise
- ✘ Expensive options
- ✘ Vinyl cabin trim on C200

SPEX (C200)

- Made in South Africa
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed auto/rear-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 5500rpm/300Nm of torque from 1200-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.3 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 138g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, automatic emergency braking, 18-inch alloy wheels, blind-spot alert, active park assist, navigation, Bluetooth, digital radio, keyless start, Artico (vinyl) upholstery.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

BMW 3 Series, Audi A4, Lexus IS, Infiniti Q50, Volvo S60

MERCEDES **E-CLASS** FROM **$80,400**

CARS OF THE YEAR WINNER



The W212 E-Class, introduced in 2010 and updated in mid-2013, opens with the 135kW/300Nm E200, with a 2.0-litre turbopetrol four/seven-speed automatic, priced at $80,400.

That's amazing value for money, as is the base 125kW/400Nm 2.1-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel E220CDi, which costs $82,900.

The E250CDi (with the same 2.1-litre turbodiesel but with 150kW and 500Nm) is $99,400, the 155kW/350Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol E250 is $97,400 and the 170kW/590Nm 2.2-litre turbodiesel/electric hybrid E300 is $109,400.

Four-cylinder turbodiesel and turbopetrol models have automatic stop/start to further improve fuel efficiency.

Previous 3.5-litre V6 and 5.5-litre V8 petrol engines have been replaced by a twin-turbo 3.0-litre V6, with 245kW and 480Nm. It carries the E400 designation, priced at $128,945.

Wagons include the $87,400 E200, the $107,300 E250CDi and the $136,845 E400. The E200 Estate is a great alternative to the seven-seater SUV. It has a fold down two-person rear-facing bench seat in the back and a power tailgate.

There are also four convertibles: the E200 at $89,400, the E250CGi at $106,900 and the E400 at $142,945.

I've tested several E-Class sedans, the most recent being the base E200. You would think that 2.0 litres and 135kW is insufficient to do anything other than make noise in a big car like the E Class, but this new engine has plenty of accessible torque -- its 300Nm is produced from just 1200rpm — and its performance is excellent.

It could be argued that the E200 is as much car as the reality of low speed limits, traffic snarls and crappy roads requires, but the 150kW version in the E250CGi does offer lovely, crisp responsiveness and markedly stronger midrange performance. It also manages the remarkable feat of achieving the same official fuel numbers as the E200.

The E400's twin-turbo 3.0-litre petrol V6 is mild and businesslike when you're just pootling around, but lean on the pedal and it takes off, with serious shove that matches Audi and BMW's force-fed 3.0-litre sixes.

The E250CDi's high-power/high-torque version of the 2.1 turbodiesel shifts the E-Class effortlessly, while averaging an almost too good to be true 4.9L/100km — and you get change from $100,000.

So there's not much incentive to spend an extra $10,000 on the E300 Hybrid, given that it offers exactly the same specification as the E250CDi and averages 4.3L/100km. It needs a larger battery to give it a few kilometres of electric-only range.

No other car cruises along a country road at speed, or obliterates bumps and potholes with the grace, comfort and poise of an E-Class, and if you do big drives on a regular basis, it's an investment in relaxation and wellbeing while you're at work.

The E Class is also loaded with Mercedes latest safety tech, including radar-controlled cruise, blind spot assitance and automatic emergency braking. The full Driver Assistance Package PLUS, the ultimate in active safety, is standard on the E250s and E400.

The E Class fours are excellent value and the pick of the range. Such is the performance, efficiency and refinement offered by Mercedes latest four-cylinder engines that, unlike previous models, there's now no logical argument for the sixes.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Brilliant four-cylinder petrol and turbodiesel engines
- ✔ Graceful, secure dynamics
- ✔ The most comfortable, enjoyable long-distance car in the world
- ✔ Formidable active safety technology
- ✔ The seven-seater is a great family wagon

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Six-cylinder models are expensive
- ✘ Convertibles are pretty loose in the body, which shimmys and shakes on a rough road

SPEX (E250)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 155kW of power at 5500rpm/350Nm of torque from 1200–4000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.4 seconds (claimed)
- 5.4L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 148gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, leather upholstery, sports package with 19-inch alloy wheels, cruise control with speed limiter, Bi-xenon headlights, automatic parking, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping and blind-spot assistance, reversing camera.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Audi A6, BMW 5 Series, Lexus GS

Pricing & specs on thousands of manufacturer makes & models

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY

MERCEDES **E-CLASS COUPE** FROM **$80,400**



The C207 E-Class coupe actually sits on the C-Class sedan platform and has a shorter wheelbase than the W212 sedan.

The E200 is $80,400, the E250 is $96,900, E250CDI diesel is $99,400 and the E400 is $129,900.

I've covered the performance of the four cylinder engines in the adjacent E-Class test. Given that the coupe is a smaller, lighter car than the sedan, their performance here will be even more impressive, and at just $80,400, the base model E200 coupe is great value.

The E400's 3.0-litre twin-turbo V6 carries its performance softly, but with a big stick. It's a much more fuel efficient engine than the previous model's 4.7-litre V8, but it doesn't quite have the grunt or the serious top-end stick of that engine either.

From low revs it pulls nonchalantly away with impeccable smoothness. When you lean on the pedal it takes off and flies all the way to redline. The seven-speed auto is smooth, responsive and efficient.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

The body is tight and even the basic, non-adjustable suspension works well, delivering outstanding body control and roadholding and producing a much more precise, immediate turn-in than usual from a large-ish Mercedes.

The driving position is adjustable to suit anyone, though a few will test the headroom.

The AMG multi-contour driver's seat has a l-o-n-g cushion, pneumatically adjustable lumbar and bolstering, but it gets a bit hard and uncomfortable after a couple of hours.

Two individual back seats are OK, though, and there's enough headroom for those up to 180cm. Legroom is reasonable, too. The boot is quite shallow but the floor is long and can be easily extended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ AMG package adds to the look and the drive
- ✔ Great value E200
- ✔ A superb long-distance machine
- ✔ Powerful, efficient four-cylinder engines, especially the 2.1-litre turbodiesel

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No V8 now. Boo
- ✘ Seven-speed isn't the quickest or most intuitive transmission when used in Sports mode. Manual downshifts can be slow too

SPEX (E400)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre twin turbo V6/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 245kW of power at 5500rpm and 480Nm of torque from 1400–4000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 5.2 seconds
- 5.7L/100km highway; 10.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 174gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, Bluetooth, navigation, dual-zone air, 19-inch alloy wheels, automatic headlights, tyre pressure warning, rain-sensing wipers, automatic parking, Harmon Kardon audio, 360-degree cameras, blind spot assistance, radar cruise control, lane departure warning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 31%

compare with...

Audi RS5, BMW 435i

MERCEDES **SL63 AMG** FROM **$384,530**



The SL Roadster has been Mercedes' signature model for 60 years. The pick of the range is the SL63 AMG, priced at $384,530. Its cabin is a 1950s retro-meets-AMG tough-guy extravaganza of leather, alloy and carbon fibre.

The two-seater SL has a hard roof, which folds away into the boot in about 10 seconds or so. In cruise mode, roof up or down, the SL is eerily calm and quiet.

Not so the five-point-five litres of twin turbocharged V8. Sure, it will loaf around town all day, but when you get on the gas it pins you back in the seat and unleashes a violent, animalistic roar, the loudest, angriest note I've ever heard from a production car.

The seven-speed MCT-7 is an auto with a single-multiplate clutch instead of a torque convertor, so it's not the smoothest box in the world. In an AMG, a bit of transmission lurch and lunge is part of the sledgehammer character that goes with the badge.

SL signifies "Super Light". Well, let's just say it used to. Although this model has shed 150kg thanks to its aluminium bodyshell, it's still two tonnes worth fuelled up, ready to roll.

So the Merc is a barge by two-seater standards, but it sure doesn't handle like one. When you point it at a corner, the SL responds with supreme grace, measured precision and no body flex or shake. At speed, it's relentlessly planted and on either suspension setting the ride is almost luxurious.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★★½
Performance	Value for money
★★★★½	★★½☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The classic Mercedes
- ✔ Monster performance
- ✔ Calm, quiet cabin in roofless mode
- ✔ Confident handling
- ✔ Comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ MCT transmission isn't the smoothest
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ You'll also tear up vast sums at trade-in time
- ✘ Infotainment system is a bit dated and clumsy

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 5.5-litre twin-turbo V8/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 395kW of power at 5500rpm/800Nm of torque from 2500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.3 seconds (claimed)
- 7.6L/100km highway; 13.9L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 231gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: six airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, AMG body kit, AMG sports seats heated with nappa leather and Airscarf neck warmers, carbon-fibre interior trim, adjustable AMG sports suspension, driving assistance package with automatic lane keeping, TV tuner
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 30%

compare with...

Aston Martin DB9, BMW M6, Maserati GranCabrio, Porsche 911

MERCEDES **SLK** FROM **$86,450**



The Mercedes-Benz SLK range opens at $86,450 for the SLK200.

This model runs a 135kW 1.8-litre turbocharged petrol engine. The same engine, tuned for 150kW/310Nm, is fitted to the SLK250, at $95,700.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★½	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★☆☆	★★★½☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

At $124,380, the SLK350 uses Mercedes' old 3.5-litre V6, with direct-injection and 224kW of power. The SLK55 AMG, with a 310kW/540Nm 5.5-litre naturally-aspirated V8, is $161,130. A seven-speed automatic is standard.

While the SLK still features a retractable metal roof, or a similarly folding tinted polycarbonate item, the party trick on the 2012 model is a "Magic Sky" glass roof, which at the push of a button changes from clear to opaque, shading the interior.

It does this by sending an electrical charge that alters the position of magnetic particles impregnated in the glass, effectively opening and closing the structure to light.

The 3.5-litre is a punchy, smooth engine that feels deceptively lazy on first acquaintance, but when you use the accelerator with intent it gets up and flies, hitting 100km/h in just 5.6 seconds.

A relatively firm suspension setup doesn't overly compromise ride comfort which, again, is superior to the BMW, cursed as it is with run-flat tyres.

The SLK's cabin is as beautiful as the exterior sheet metal. Lovely retro touches are complemented by high-tech designer lighting, including gorgeous red strip lights that run along the door trims.

Typically firm Mercedes sports seats feature Airscarf vents that can direct warm air on to the back of your neck.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Beautifully styled, inside and out
- ✔ The right mix of sport and luxury
- ✔ Smooth, powerful 3.5-litre V6
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✔ Good value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Seven-speed auto is a bit slow
- ✘ Complex, dated audio controls
- ✘ Not a lot of boot space with the roof down
- ✘ 3.5 likes a drink in town

SPEX (SLK350)
- Made in Germany
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 6500rpm/370Nm of torque at 3500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 5.6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.1L/100km highway; 12.1L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 194gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, heated sports seats with Airscarf, CD player, iPod connectivity, navigation, bi-xenon headlights, dual-zone air, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 32%

compare with...
Audi TT, BMW Z4, Porsche Boxster

MERCEDES **E63 AMG S** FROM **$250,930**



In 2011, Mercedes replaced the E63 AMG's naturally aspirated 6.2-litre V8 with a twin-turbo 5.5-litre engine, with 386kW/700Nm. A mighty 410kW and an even mightier 800Nm was available with the optional performance package, hooked up to a seven-speed automatic with an automated clutch instead of a torque convertor.

In mid 2013, the car received its first major update, specific to Australia, in the shape of the S model. Australia is one of AMG's major markets.

This version produces 430kW of power, thanks to ECU recalibrations and an increase in boost pressure.

It now hits 100km/h from rest in just 4.1 seconds. In Germany, it's only available with the 4MATIC all-wheel-drive system, but Mercedes Australia, well aware that we like our performance cars to be rear-wheel drives, has secured this version for our market.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety	Comfort and refinement
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Quality and reliability
★★★★☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★½☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★½☆

Converting all this power and grunt into forward motion is a problem. The AMG is a big, heavy car that takes some learning before you can drive it as it's supposed to be driven.

It goes like the proverbial, sounds fabulous, and at the top end the force-fed 5.5-litre V8 spins so fast you need F1 reflexes to get the gear changes right, but in tight stuff the Merc is hard work.

The engine is mad keen to unload all that performance, but the traction-control electronics intervene early and often to stop an orgy of wheelspin and fried rubber. That's why our version is half a second slower to 100km/h than the all-wheel-drive Euro model.

A car of incredible potential, but ultimately frustrating, just like BMW's similarly ballistic M5.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Ballistic V8
- ✔ Best handling E-Class yet
- ✔ Adjustability of drivetrain and suspension to suit different roads and driving styles
- ✔ Great long-distance driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Body flex on firm suspension settings
- ✘ Engine can't get all that torque to the road
- ✘ The all-wheel-drive version hits 100km/h in just 3.6 seconds.
- ✘ Weak resale values

SPEX
- Made in Germany
- 5.5-litre twin-turbo V8/seven-speed wet clutch transmission/rear-wheel drive
- 430kW of power at 5550rpm/800Nm of torque from 2000-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 7.7L/100km highway; 14.0L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 234gkm
- Standard: seven airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, Nappa leather upholstery, sunroof, reversing camera, front and rear parking sensors, ventilated and heated front seats with massage function, navigation, Bluetooth, TV, side and rear window blinds, power boot lid
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 29%

compare with...
BMW M5, HSV GTS, Jaguar XFR-S, Porsche Panamera Turbo S

MERCEDES **S-CLASS** FROM **$195,000**



Mercedes W222 S-Class prices start at $195,000 for the S300 Bluetec 2.1-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel hybrid, which produces 150kW/500Nm yet averages a mere 4.5L/100km. The 190kW/620Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel is available in the S350, priced at $215,000. The 335kW/700Nm 4.7-litre twin turbopetrol V8 S500 is $285,000. A seven-speed automatic is standard. Long wheelbase version cost $222,500 and $310,000 respectively. The 430kW/900Nm 5.5-litre twin turbopetrol V8 S63 AMG is $385,000.

The W222 S-Class takes the badge's "go where none has been before" engineering philosophy to new extremes. This car can, literally, drive itself, however Mercedes won't let you operate it in full driverless mode because this also requires the car to be preloaded with complex prototype 3-D digital maps, which the navigation system uses as references when making decisions about when to go, stop and turn.

So you still have to drive the production S-Class in a conventional sense, however the same technology that will one day make it a completely autonomous vehicle — such as automatic emergency braking, lane keeping and adaptive cruise control — is now employed to give you the most protective safety envelope you can get in any car.

Mercedes Intelligent Drive system is based on the premise that the car's progress is monitored from a complete 360-degrees perspective. The 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel is all the engine you need. It's also the highest-scoring diesel in the *Green Vehicle Guide*, with 4.5 stars out of five.

Fuel consumption is a remarkably low 6.0 litres per 100 kilometres. Think about that for a moment. This is from a car that's more than five metres long, weighs two tonnes and hits 100km/h from rest in just 6.8 seconds. The S 500's 4.7-litre twin-turbo petrol V8 launches the S to 100km/h in 4.8 seconds while returning 9.2 litres per 100 kilometres.

Whatever engine is up front, the big Merc gets up and flies when you put your foot down. At any speed, you enjoy the complete cone of silence effect in the cabin, as Mercedes has all but eliminated any trace of noise, vibration and harshness.

The S has traditionally been a secure handler, however its sheer bulk has also made it rather ponderous and tank-like, especially in corners.

Not so the W222, which is a much more engaging, enjoyable drive. Its air springs and adaptive dampers can be set to Comfort or Sport; the latter means what it says and in this mode the S can be hustled along a winding road with poise and agility, though the ride is noticeably more terse than it is in Comfort.

Inside, you face a dash that's classically elegant and technologically ahead of the game. The finest leathers, highly polished timbers and wonderfully tactile metal surfaces sit comfortably alongside the two 12.5-inch TFT digital information displays, comprising instruments on the right and infotainment on the left. Front- and rear-seat occupants can access their own WLAN and Wi-Fi hotpots via their smartphones; two USB ports, DAB radio, TV tuner, voice activation and audible delivery of text messages and emails are also featured in Mercedes' latest NTG5 infotainment package.

The W222 S-Class isn't by a long shot the most expensive luxury sedan that money can buy, but it is certainly the best.



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide	★★★★½
Performance	★★★★☆
Handling	★★★½☆
Quality and reliability	★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement	★★★★☆
Value for money	★★★★☆
Overall	★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The safest car in the world
- ✔ In this class, it's good value
- ✔ Clean, efficient turbodiesel
- ✔ Completely planted at any speed
- ✔ A high tech masterpiece

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Resale vales are awful
- ✘ Air suspension can produce a slightly terse ride in Sport
- ✘ Remote control steering

SPEX (S350)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/seven-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 190kW of power at 3600rpm/620Nm of torque from 1600-2400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.8 seconds (claimed)
- 5.2L/100km highway; 7.5L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 159gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels, navigation, Bluetooth phone and audio, smartphone connectivity, integrated WLAN hotspot, DAB radio, TV, automatic parking, 360-degree cameras, radar cruise, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping, blind spot information, Pre-Safe Plus
- Redbook future values: 3yr 48%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Audi A7 Sportback, BMW 7 Series, Jaguar XJ, Porsche Panamera

MERCEDES **M-CLASS** FROM **$83,500**



The third-generation Mercedes M-Class introduced four-cylinder power to what had been an exclusively six- and eight-cylinder contest.

The 2015 M-Class opens with the 150kW 2.1-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/seven-speed automatic ML250 BlueTEC, priced at a sharp $83,500. That's about $10,000 less than the base Audi Q7 and BMW X5.

The 190kW 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel ML350 BlueTEC is $101,430.

The petrol range starts with the trusty 225kW 3.5-litre V6 ML350 Blue Efficiency, at $101,900.

The 245kW 4.0-litre twin-turbopetrol V6 ML400 is $103,430, the 300kW, twin-turbo 4.7-litre V8 ML500 is $121,430, while the fearsome ML63 AMG, with a 386kW 5.5-litre twin-turbo V8, is $181,430.

How much performance is enough does depend on how you interpret what happens when your right foot squeezes the pedal, but with 500Nm of torque from 1600rpm, the 2.1-litre four is hardly lacking grunt and it will drive the ML250 to 100km/h in a respectable 9.0 seconds. In most situations, you need never see the high side of 3000rpm.

The gentlest accelerator pressure gets the ML250 up and rolling, and keeps it there in an easy, unfussed manner.

The pay-off for four cylinders is average consumption of just 6.4L/100km according to official tests. A Toyota Yaris averages 6.3L/100km.

With the standard 70-litre tank, the ML250 can travel more than 1100km between fuel stops; with the optional 93-litre tank, range increases to 1500 kilometres.

Automatic stop/start contributes to fuel efficiency, as does electric power steering, on-demand fuel and water pumps, low rolling resistance tyres and an aerodynamically efficient (by the standards of your average house) body. An optional off-road pack includes low-range gearing and six programmed driving modes for different terrain, similar to Land Rover's Terrain Response system.

Standard suspension uses steel springs with non-adjustable variable rate dampers. Air suspension with adaptive dampers is available as an option.

The M-Class is much more comfortable than a BMW X5 but, in base suspension spec, also far less agile and rapid through a set of corners.

That said, like any big Mercedes, once you get used to how the body moves and gain confidence, it's surprisingly quick and exceptionally secure on rough country roads. The brakes, though, are still afflicted by a spongy, unresponsive pedal.

The M-Class remains a five-seater, with ample room for everybody and adjustable backrest angles for the back seat, though tall adults sit a bit knees-up here.

The dash layout is still of the "more buttons the better" school, and a high central display screen includes a reversing camera and internet connectivity is possible via your wireless device. The firm, supportive driver's seat is wrapped in fake cow.

Active parking assist, also standard, will back the ML, hands-free, into a parallel reverse parking spot for you. Most of the time...

A large boot has a temporary spare under the floor and can easily be extended to moving furniture size with the 60/40-split rear seat.

The M-Class has had its reliability issues but these seem to have diminished since the mid-1990s original.

The ML250 BlueTEC is a big, comfortable, stylish wagon, very capable on the road, and with that superb four-cylinder turbodiesel under the bonnet, also amazingly fuel efficient for a vehicle of this size and weight.

You should compare it with BMW's 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel X5 25d, Audi's Q5 and VW's Touareg before making a decision.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Torquey, frugal four-cylinder turbodiesel
- ✔ Smooth, comfortable ride
- ✔ Safe and secure on rough roads
- ✔ Good value for money
- ✔ Spacious and well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Spongy, unresponsive brakes
- ✘ Temporary spare
- ✘ Wouldn't you rather have real rather than fake cow upholstery when you're spending $83,500?
- ✘ Carries suspect reliability baggage

SPEX (ML250)

- Made in the USA
- 2.1-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/seven-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 150kW of power at 4200rpm/500Nm of torque from 1600-1800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.0 seconds (claimed)
- 5.8L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 170gkm (EU figures)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, active parking assist, reversing camera, single CD, Bluetooth, iPod and internet connectivity, voice control, navigation, tyre pressure warning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Audi Q5, BMW X5, VW Touareg

MINI FROM $24,500



The third-generation Mini (since 2000) showcases a new fuel-efficient engine family developed by owner BMW. It also premieres a platform that will underpin a future generation of front-wheel-drive BMWs.

The Mini One, priced at $24,500, is powered with a 75kW/180Nm 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol. The Cooper runs 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbocharged engines — a 100kW/220Nm petrol and an 84kW/270Nm diesel, using the same crankcase. Then there's a 141kW/300Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol that powers the Cooper S and within 18 months, the hotter JCW edition.

The Cooper range starts with the turbopetrol and turbodiesel triples, priced from $26,650 for the Cooper and $31,800 for the Cooper D, plus the Cooper S, priced at $36,950. Gearboxes are also all-new, a smoother six-speed manual and a six-speed automatic with paddle shifters. The latter is streets ahead of the outgoing car and a strong argument for a clutchless Mini.

In design, the third-generation Mini doesn't stray far from its roots. Pick the new model from a different taillight shape and full-frame grille aspects as a starter, before noting that it's a bit bigger in both overall length and wheelbase.

Oddly, in sizing up to silence critics of the poor cabin and boot room, the new car seems to have grown only below the waistline.

Rear-seat legroom expands from non-existent to a barely liveable space for two adults — though that's subject to the legroom demands of the front occupants — while the token boot has 30 per cent more space than previously, but is still tiny.

Roads served up on the test route degraded from concrete to bumpy B-routes to winding — and extremely scenic — rural roads of broken bitumen. The Mini still rides like a billy cart, as BMW stresses the handling side of the compromise, and it's only softened a little by the longer wheelbase.

The star is the turbopetrol triple that is flexible at low revs, strong through the mid range and responsive near the redline. It's an easy car to enjoy, helped by the slick, precise six-speed manual.

The Cooper S with an auto enjoys being flicked up and down via the paddle shifters. Again, there's lots of torque, but a less linear delivery that's more biased towards the top end. It's the power characteristics buyers of this type of car will enjoy because you have to work at it.

The outlook from the driver's seat remains clear, enhanced by the chamfered box of the body and increasing use of driver aids such as parking sensors and a reverse camera.

New for this model are window switches on the door panels (formerly in the lower centre console) and the tacho/digital speedo set on the steering column. The big central speedo is now occupied by the infotainment system controls, which, like the originals, are still far from intuitive or logical. The same goes for the overall dash layout.

That won't dissuade buyers of the Mini. Despite its many idiosyncrasies and compromises, ongoing reliability and quality issues and ambitious pricing, it inspires great affection in some. And loathing in others.

As we went to press, a five-door version of the Mini was due for launch.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ A retro design that works
- ✔ 21st-century engines, with strong performance and outstanding efficiency, plus a refined automatic
- ✔ Wonderfully agile and responsive handling on a tight, smooth road
- ✔ Strong safety credentials

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Punishing ride
- ✘ Space-saver spare or aerosol can. Useless
- ✘ Dash layout still a dog's breakfast
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ Squeaks, rattles and other potential sources of grief

SPEX (COOPER)

- 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power from 4500-6000rpm/220Nm of torque from 1250-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.9 seconds (claimed)
- 3.8L/100km highway; 5.7L/100km city/95 octane premium/CO^2 emissions are 105g/km
- Warranty: three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: six airbags, stability control, electronic differential lock, Bluetooth, smartphone connectivity, navigation, 16-inch alloy wheels, rear camera
- Redbook future values (2013 Cooper): 3yr 50%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...

Audi A1, Citroen DS3, Fiat 500, VW Polo

MINI **COUNTRYMAN** FROM **$34,150**



Mini's Countryman wagon is fun to drive and easy to live with, but you're paying top dollar for the feelgood factor of that retro badge.

The range opens with the 90kW Cooper 1.6-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive at $34,150. The 140kW Cooper S 1.6-litre twin-scroll turbopetrol manual is $42,550.

The Cooper S ALL4 (all-wheel-drive) manual is $45,500. A six-speed automatic adds $2350.

Turbodiesels include an 82kW 1.6-litre/six-speed manual D, priced from $36,950, and a 105kW 2.0-litre/six speed manual SD, available only as an ALL4 from $46,990.

The three-door Countryman derivative, the front-wheel-drive 1.6-litre Cooper Paceman, is $34,150. The S is $42,550.

The 1.6-litre twin-scroll turbopetrol engine delivers strong performance, spread across the midrange from about 2500-5000rpm. Responsiveness is considerably enhanced in Sport mode. The 2.0-litre turbodiesel SD is arguably the pick of the engines, with 305Nm of torque from just 1750rpm.

The manual is fitted with automatic stop/start and averages a frugal 4.9L/100km.

There won't be many other SUVs that will keep it in sight on a winding piece of bitumen, that's for sure. As a bonus, the ride is also luxurious by Mini standards even on run-flats.

If you sit in a VW Tiguan or a BMW X1 after the Countryman, you'll probably be reluctant to spend big money on the Mini.

There's still an excess of hard, cheap plastics and Mini continues to disappoint its owners according to independent surveys of new car quality and reliability.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★½☆	Value for money ★★½☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ A Mini that's also practical as a day-to-day vehicle
- ✔ Great handling and steering
- ✔ Punchy, economical 2.0-litre SD
- ✔ Looks as cool as cool can be
- ✔ Clever back seat/load area design

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ You can buy a BMW X1 for the same price as a Countryman ALL4. That's crazy
- ✘ Quality and reliability are still issues with Mini
- ✘ 1.6 turbopetrol gets buzzy and coarse at the top end
- ✘ The dash was designed by someone who set out to make it as incomprehensible as possible

SPEX (ALL4 S manual)
- Made in England
- 1.6-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual or automatic/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 5500rpm/260Nm of torque from 1600-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.2L/100 city, 95 octane premium. CO^2 emissions are 171gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automatic air, 17-inch alloys, Bluetooth, rear parking sensors, rain sensing wipers, USB port, leather-wrapped steering wheel and gear lever
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...
BMW X1, Subaru XV, VW Tiguan

MINI **COUPE & ROADSTER** FROM **$34,900**



Mini's Coupe starts at $34,900 for the base 90kW 1.6-litre Cooper. It's $42,990 in Cooper S specification, with a 135kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder engine matched with a six-speed manual gearbox, as tested. A six-speed automatic adds $2350 to both.

The Roadster, which has a folding soft-top, starts at $37,500 for the Cooper and $45,500 for the Cooper S manual; again, a six-speed automatic adds $2350.

The 1.6-litre turbopetrol four in the Cooper S uses a twin-scroll turbocharger and direct injection to deliver seamless, punchy performance and excellent fuel efficiency.

The fact that it's in such a small, light car, with the assistance of a smooth, precise close-ratio gearbox, makes the Coupe a real joy to drive.

Suspension is very firm and with its low centre of gravity, wide tracks and the assistance of an electronic limited-slip diff, the Coupe is arguably the best-handling Mini to date.

You can option sports suspension, but this would transform the ride from hard and uncomfortable to absolutely brutal.

Electric power steering is done superbly in the Mini.

There's none of the vagueness on centre or lack of feel you get with many other EPS systems; the Coupe goes exactly where you point it with minimal effort.

Inside, the Coupe is the usual Mini ergonomic disaster zone, while the driver's seat, though adjustable for most physiques, is hard and diabolically uncomfortable for anyone but a very skinny supermodel.

Rather a lot of them like to drive Minis, apparently, so who am I to complain?

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★☆☆☆☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Cracker 1.6 turbopetrol engine
- ✔ Smooth, slick, six-speed manual
- ✔ Fabulous handling on a smooth road
- ✔ Good fuel and emissions numbers
- ✔ Strong brakes

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Uncomfortable driver's seat
- ✘ Minis aren't the most durable, reliable cars in the world
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ No spare

SPEX (Cooper S coupe)
- Made in England
- 1.6-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 135kW of power at 5500rpm/240Nm of torque from 1600-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.9 seconds (claimed)
- 5.2L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 146gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, bi-xenon headlights, Bluetooth (but not with audio streaming), USB connector, cloth upholstery, rain-sensing wipers, tyre pressure monitor
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Audi A1, Renault Clio, VW Polo GTi

MITSUBISHI **LANCER** FROM **$18,990**



Mitsubishi's Lancer sedan range uses a 113kW 2.0-litre four with a standard five-speed manual as the base drivetrain. Start money ($18,990) buys the ES Sport. LS is $20,990. XLS, with a 125kW 2.4-litre engine, is $26,490. The five-door Sportback 2.4-litre GSR is $21,990.

A continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission. adds $2000 to all Lancer variants.

The Alfa-lookalike Lancer was developed and designed in Europe, as you can probably tell.

The cabin is spacious and comfortable, if heavy on cheap plastics. Everything is where it should be, there's plenty of handy storage and it's well screwed together, free of chirps, rattles and squeaks.

Stability control and seven airbags are standard.

The steering wheel is height adjustable but inexplicably there is no reach adjustment provided. The long travel driver's seat is comfortable, as is the back seat, which has plenty of legroom.

The sedan's big boot can be extended with the 60/40 split-fold rear seat back and has a space-saver under the floor.

Boot space in the Sportback is severely compromised by the sloping rear roofline.

There's no lip over which you have to lift stuff, though, and the 60/40 seat backs can be lowered.

The 2.0-litre is quite peaky in its delivery but this is effectively overcome by the CVT, which keeps it pinned at 3000rpm plus when you put your foot down.

Off-the-line acceleration is strong, the car climbs hills without the usual hunting and surging of conventional autos in this class and, if you wish, you can use the transmission sequentially with five defined shift points that simulate actual gears.

Mitsubishi has kept the Lancer competitive for 2015 by adding gear and cutting prices. The base ES Sport gets 16-inch alloys and a body kit, for example, but sporty it ain't.

LS includes touch-screen infotainment, a rear camera, leather-faced upholstery and heated front seats.

Not bad for $20,990.

The Lancer has suspension that's very soft and tuned primarily for a smooth ride.

It's also a large, heavy car by class standards, so if you drive it at all enthusiastically it's all over the place with early and prodigious understeer in tight bends.

The steering is light and not particularly accurate.

The brakes are powerful, though, and the ride is luxurious on smoother roads.

XLS adds sports suspension, navigation, automatic wipers, 18-inch wheels, sports front seats and fabric, unique panel and door trim, paddle shifts (CVT model only), and Rockford Fosgate audio.

Sportback also gets 18-inch alloys and navigation, plus a body kit, but it ain't sporty either.

Mitsubishi has been very aggressive on Lancer pricing with special editions also offered at drive-away prices. If you're after quality, affordable family transport, and one of the biggest cabins in this class, the ES Sport and LS are competitive.

However it does feel very old and tired compared with its rivals. That's because the Lancer is one of the oldest cars in the class.

I'd suggest test driving the Lancer against similarly sized and priced competitors such as the Holden Cruze, Mazda3 and Toyota Corolla. These are much more sophisticated, refined cars.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Cheap and well equipped
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Plenty of space
- ✔ 2.0-litre/CVT delivers reasonable performance

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Drives like an old car. Because it is
- ✘ Thirsty
- ✘ Handles like a barge
- ✘ Steers like one, too
- ✘ Tight boot in Sportback

SPEX (ES Sport)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre, four-cylinder petrol/ five-speed manual/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 113kW of power at 6000rpm/198Nm of torque at 4250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.5 seconds
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- 6.4L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 91 octane. CO^2 emissions are 196gkm
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, active front seat head restraints,16-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth with audio streaming and voice control, automatic air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Holden Cruze, Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Subaru Impreza, Toyota Corolla

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★☆☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



All the tools to help you find,compare and decide

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

MITSUBISHI **i-MIEV** FROM **$48,800**



If you owned a Mitsubishi i-MiEV (pronounced I-meev), and had a solar power system on your roof, you could drive out the gate each morning in a genuine sun-powered car — as in spin-free, honest-to-goodness zero-emissions motoring.

Mitsubishi claims the i-MiEV's range is 140–160 kilometres, but after the recommended six to eight hours of recharging plugged into a 240-volt power point (a 15-amp one, which any electrician can install in 10 minutes), the distance to empty meter said I only had 70 kilometres worth of go-forward in the 330-volt lithium-ion battery.

Twenty-five kilometres later it was still showing 70 kilometres; after 35 kilometres it was on 65, so although I didn't run the battery flat, a 100-kilometre range is about what you'll get in the real world.

That's enough for most city commuters to get to work and back or for a day's worth of 'round town driving.

Handling can be precarious and at highway speeds the steering has only a vague sense of direction. It's OK around town, though, and just like your average $13,990 small car.

Therein lies the i-MiEV's fatal flaw. If it had a petrol engine, that's the class in which it would compete. It's a tiny (but quite spacious for its size) four-seater, the interior is as basic as they come and it's got nothing going for it apart from being cheap transport.

The i-MiEV will share the fate of other pioneer technologies. Today, it's an expensive oddity; however, in five to 10 years dozens of imitators, mainly from China, will be selling the same idea at one-tenth of the price and electric cars will be everywhere.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★☆☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Recharge it with renewable power and you have a zero-emission car
- ✔ Works great as a commuter or city runabout

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ The price isn't realistic
- ✘ If you run out of power, you have a big problem
- ✘ The worst resale values on the market
- ✘ Basic interior

SPEX
- Made in Japan
- Lithium-ion battery/electric motor, reduction gears, rear-wheel drive
- 47kW of power from 3000–6000rpm/180Nm of torque from 1–2000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 10 seconds
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, CD player, alarm, air conditioning, 15-inch alloy wheels, leather steering wheel and gear knob
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 29%; 5yr: 18%

compare with...
Holden Volt, Nissan Leaf, Toyota Prius C, VW Up.

MITSUBISHI **MIRAGE** FROM **$11,490**



Mitsubishi's five-door Mirage hatch starts at $11,490 for the 57kW 1.2-litre three-cylinder/five-speed manual ES; a CVT automatic adds $2000. LS is $12,990 or $14,990 with CVT. The sedan opens at $14,490 for the ES; ES with CVt is $16,490. LS sedan with CVT is $17,490.

If you're after an easy-to-drive, bulletproof small car with low running costs, the Mirage is worth your attention. Sure, its 1.2-litre engine isn't going to burn up the bitumen, but its performance is reasonable and, with the optional CVT, it's also quite refined in operation. The CVT is definitely worth taking here because the transmission makes the most of the engine's relatively low outputs and also delivers a smoother drive than the manual.

The 1.2 works hard, though, so expect higher fuel consumption than the official figure listed in the Spex. I averaged 7.2L/100km on test.

Mirage is surprisingly roomy and four adults can happily take a cross-town trip. The boot is also big by class standards.

Mirage is set up for comfort, but it's also very light and fitted with quality Bridgestone tyres so handling is fine.

A simple, attractive dash features a big, central speedo. The steering wheel also has Bluetooth and audio switches. Sometimes the USB connected with my iPod, other times it didn't.

The little Mitsubishi is well built, tight and solid. It's backed by a five-years/130,000km warranty and capped-price servicing, runs on regular unleaded and will be reliable for many years.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Well built and reliable
- ✔ Cheap to buy and to run
- ✔ 1.2/CVT works nicely
- ✔ Comfortable and spacious
- ✔ Safe

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ It ain't quick
- ✘ CVT can be a tad snatchy at times
- ✘ Dead steering at straight-ahead position at about 80-90km/h
- ✘ No steering wheel reach adjustment

SPEX (ES CVT)
- Made in Thailand
- 1.2-litre three-cylinder petrol/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 57kW of power at 6000rpm/100Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 4.1L/100km highway; 5.5L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO^2 emissions are 109gkm
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, CD player, USB, Bluetooth with audio streaming, leather-wrapped steering wheel with phone and audio controls, 14-inch steel wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...
Fiat 500, Hyundai i20, Toyota Yaris

MITSUBISHI **LANCER RALLIART** FROM **$37,990**



Given that hot four petrolheads seeking an alternative to Subaru's WRX waited a long time for this car, the result is disappointing.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★☆☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

The Ralliart's not bad, but Subaru's WRX is clearly the superior car.

The Ralliart costs the same whether you take it as a sedan or the Sportback hatch. It runs a 2.0-litre turbocharged four with 177kW of power and 343Nm worth of torque.

It puts this to the road via Mitsubishi's twin-clutch automated manual six-speed gearbox (WRX comes with a conventional manual) with two modes: Normal and Sport. The Evolution's manic super-sporty shift map isn't included here.

All-wheel drive has most of the Evolution's trick torque shuffling gear including the active centre diff and active stability control, though without active yaw control.

Brakes are humble twin pistons at the front. Wheels are 18-inch alloys and tyres are non-stick 215/45 Yokohama Advan A10s.

The 2.0-litre feels very different to its Subaru rival in that there is almost no turbo sensation. It goes like a hot atmo motor. I clocked it at 6.3 seconds to 100km/h. The twin-clutch box is a good thing. Big paddles behind the wheel make DIY shifts easy, fast and smooth.

The Ralliart corners nice and flat with little understeer and minimal body roll.

The brakes, though, are a bit like the tyres — underdone — and the steering lacks the precision, feel and sharpness of the Evolution. The ride's pretty good, but that's not why you'd buy this car.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Double-clutch gearbox
- ✔ Strong resale values
- ✔ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Slippery tyres
- ✘ Underbraked
- ✘ Too many warning buzzers
- ✘ No reach adjustment for the wheel
- ✘ Tacky placky cabin

SPEX (Sportback)
- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 177kW of power at 6000rpm/343Nm of torque at 2500-4750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds
- 8.0L/100km highway/13.9L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 243gkm
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, cruise control, in-dash six-stack CD, Bluetooth, iPod plug in, 18-inch alloys, Data Dots, alarm, automatic air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...
Ford Focus ST, RenaultSport Megane 265, Subaru WRX, VW Golf GTi

MITSUBISHI **EVOLUTION** FROM **$52,990**



The base Evolution with a five-speed manual gearbox starts at $52,990.

The twin-clutch automated manual MR, tested here, is $58,990. That's a $7000 price cut for 2015, in response to Subaru's aggressive pricing on the latest WRX STi. Still, at $49,990, the WRX is an absolute bargain.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★☆☆☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★★☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

The 217kW 2.0-litre engine is wonderfully potent and responsive, especially when working with the TC-SST gearbox's S-Sport performance map.

This shifts gears with exceptional speed and has an uncanny ability to pick the right time and place to downshift, such as under hard braking, while also blipping the throttle to just the right extent.

The Evolution is a finely balanced, neutral car that doesn't feel as heavy as the scales say it is.

Body control is superb, as is the level of feedback you get from both ends of the car. The steering is direct, light and pin sharp. The brakes are powerful and controllable.

It's one of those rare cars that seems to handle and respond better as speeds rise.

The Evolution is up to Mitsubishi's usual high-quality standard, but the overall feel of the cabin and the quality of materials used is more like $25,000 worth than $50,000-plus.

Comparably priced European cars Audi S3 and VW Golf R have much more luxurious interiors.

But they don't blitz a set of corners like an Evolution does.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ A no-compromise performance car
- ✔ All-wheel-drive system is almost idiot-proof
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ TC-SST gearbox
- ✔ Recaro driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Overpriced compared with WRX STi
- ✘ Works best only at a track
- ✘ $25,000 interior
- ✘ Excessive tyre noise
- ✘ No steering wheel reach adjustment

SPEX (MR)
- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged petrol/six-speed manual/six-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 217kW of power at 6500rpm/366Nm of torque at 3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.2 seconds
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- 8.6L/100km highway; 14.1L/100km city; 98 octane premium. CO^2 emissions are 250gkm
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, automatic air, keyless entry, Recaro front seats, automatic headlights, rain-sensing wipers, Bluetooth, alarm, rear camera and 18-inch Enkei alloy wheels with 245/40 Dunlop SP Sport tyres
- MR adds lightweight, two-piece brake discs, Bilstein monotube suspension dampers, Eibach springs, high-intensity definition headlights, forged aluminium BBS wheels, leather upholstery, heated front seats, premium audio, iPod connectivity and voice activated navigation
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...
Audi S3, Subaru WRX STi, VW Golf R

MITSUBISHI **OUTLANDER** FROM **$27,740**



The base front-wheel-drive 2.0-litre petrol/five-speed manual Outlander ES five-seater is $27,740; a continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission adds $2250. The LS, with the CVT as standard, is $33,490.

The all-wheel-drive 2.4-litre petrol CVT ES five-seater is $32,990; the seven-seater AWD CVT LS (tested here) is $36,490.

The 2.2-litre turbodiesel AWD six-speed automatic seven-seater LS DiD is $39,490.

Aspire seven-seaters cost $43,890 (2.4/CVT) and $46,890 (2.2 DiD/six-speed auto) respectively.

The CVT transmission tries as hard as it can to flatter the 2.4-litre petrol engine, but it's a struggle at times. In normal drive mode the Outlander is sluggish off the line and slow to reach your chosen speed, unless you use a lot of revs. You have to push the pedal halfway to the floor and wait for the CVT to spin the engine up to speed, which takes too long. CVTs can be efficient and responsive, but not this one. You get a lot of noise and too little action compared with a conventional automatic.

If you are fully loaded with kids and gear, you'll probably wish you had bought the diesel, which I haven't driven. At the relatively modest $3000 premium in LS specification, though, I'd suggest it's money well spent.

The Outlander PHEV plug-in petrol/electric hybrid, tested separately on page 111, is a good thing, too.

It has a lithium-ion battery that gives the car an electric-only range of up to 55 kilometres. It uses an electric drive motor at each end of the vehicle. Its 2.0-litre petrol engine can operate as a generator or as part of the drivetrain, giving a range of up to 880 kilometres.

It's priced at $47,490, or $52,490 for the Aspire.

The Outlander is resolutely anti-sport, but it's light, so although pretty big by class standards it doesn't feel cumbersome. The steering itself is over-assisted and imprecise. Big, baggy Grandtreks and soft suspension let some bump and thump into the cabin, so the ride, though acceptable, is less smooth and quiet than it should be. The tyres generate excessive resonance on coarse bitumen, too. The brakes are adequate.

Aspire models include a power tailgate, navigation, adaptive cruise control and an audible warning/two-stage automatic braking system to minimise the chance of a rear-end collision with the car in front.

Mitsubishi's relentlessly grey interiors are as dour and dull as its sheet metal, but there's no issue with quality or functionality. The simple, uncluttered dash features bright, illuminated instruments with a trip computer display between, plus a touch screen for the audio and phone, which incorporates a rear camera.

The deep dash cowl and long bonnet make the Outlander seem pretty big from the driver's seat. Row two is spacious and comfortable. The middle seatbelt, though, is roof-mounted, so it's a pain in the neck to use.

Row three is two individual seats that fold easily out of the floor. They are fine for younger kids, and if you adjust row two on its tracks, you can give everybody reasonable legroom.

If you're over 180 centimetres, you'll whack your head on the tailgate occasionally and utter bad words.

In five-seat mode, there is reasonable carrying capacity; you can also fold the 60/40 split row-two seat backs to make an extended floor of 1.75 metres.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Space-efficient seven-seater
- ✔ Safe and solid
- ✔ Long warranty and strong resale value
- ✔ An excellent kid carrier
- ✔ Acceptable handling and roadholding

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Sluggish performance, amplified by inefficient CVT transmission
- ✘ Ride can get a bit jostly on rough roads
- ✘ Over-assisted, vague steering
- ✘ Seven-seater models are overpriced compared with Holden Captiva, Hyundai Santa Fe and Kia Sorento

SPEX (LS AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 124kW of power at 6000rpm and 220Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO^2 emissions are 174gkm
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, 18-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, reverse-parking sensors, camera and an alarm; LS adds two back seats, tinted glass, touch-screen audio, navigation, dual-zone air, leather seat inserts
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Holden Captiva, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Nissan X-Trail

MITSUBISHI **OUTLANDER PHEV** FROM **$47,490**



Mitsubishi's Outlander PHEV — for Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle — is the low-to-zero-emissions technology Mitsubishi is mortgaging its entire future on. This model is just the first of many.

To help the cause, the Outlander PHEV, priced from $47,490, is well within striking distance of most popular medium-sized SUV diesels. Here, though, the similarities cease.

Under the bonnet are an 87kW/186Nm 2.0-litre petrol engine, a generator and one 60kW permanent magnet synchronous electric motor that drives the front wheels, while a larger 60kW electric motor plus a lithium-ion battery pack beneath the cargo floor powers the rear wheels. No mechanical connection between the two axles exists.

It all sounds complicated, but for the driver it boils down to three easy modes of operation. In default "EV" (Electric Vehicle) mode, up to 60km/h, the two electric motors drive all wheels. Maximum range here is 52km — a distance that is within most Australians' daily commute.

Beyond that range — or at speeds between 60km/h and 120km/h — the "Series Hybrid" mode seamlessly takes over, using the petrol engine, powering the generator to (noisily) replenish the batteries that continue, via the electric motors, to drive the wheels. A 900km-plus total range is possible before the 45-litre tank runs out. Helping out is regenerative braking that captures otherwise lost energy.

Alternatively, drivers can plug the PHEV into a normal household 10-amp socket. At 30 cents per kilowatt-hour, an eight-hour charge costs about $3.60; find (or install) a 15A supply to cut that down to five hours.

Finally, there is a "Parallel Hybrid" mode that has the engine delivering torque directly to the front wheels from 120km/h. If extra oomph is required above that, the electric motors can also contribute.

Now, piloting the PHEV couldn't be more straightforward.Push the button and all you hear are clicks and the whir of electrics preparing to silently whisk the PHEV away. Plant your foot and a turbine-smooth push gets things moving immediately. Performance is acceptable no matter which mode the Mitsubishi finds itself in. The 0-100km/h sprint time takes 11 seconds.

We managed about 30km in pure EV mode with the air-con on before the electricity supply depleted, and found that a similar distance again in Series Hybrid mode was enough to almost fully recharge the batteries.

The Outlander's electric steering feels light and artificial, adding to the ponderous nature of the handling and betraying the PHEV's 185kg weight penalty.

The ride isn't as cushy as you might hope, with the tyres transmitting bumps and road noise with dispiriting regularity. As tested, the $52,490 Aspire's cabin ambience suffers due to an over-abundance of hard, scratchy plastics. The driver at least faces a pleasant and beautifully laid-out dash and is in control of a number of high-tech features that do help make up for the perceived quality shortfall.

There's also plenty of space for five adults, although the rear-seat cushions feel hard and there are no face-level vents back there. Neither is a seven-seater version available.

At 888 litres, total cargo capacity is some 700 litres short of regular Outlanders, yet sufficient space remains for the needs of most families. Furthermore, the (raised) floor is still at bumper level with hidden storage options beneath.

The Outlander PHEV is an extraordinary take on an otherwise ordinary medium SUV. Although far from perfect, it is a worthy and historic step towards normalising what was previously a fringe green technology.



STARS ★★★½☆

Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Affordable plug-in hybrid technology
- ✔ Silent electric vehicle motoring
- ✔ No range-anxiety issues
- ✔ Roomy and practical SUV body
- ✔ Low running costs
- ✔ Mitsubishi's long warranty and four-year capped-price servicing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Feel-free steering and poor body control
- ✘ Lumpy ride
- ✘ Low-cost cabin ambience
- ✘ Flat seats
- ✘ Weak resale values

SPEX

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/plug-in hybrid EV/all-wheel drive
- 87kW of power at 4500rpm/186Nm of torque from 4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 11 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- 1.9L/100km combined; regular unleaded. CO^2 emissions are 44g/km
- Max towing weight: 1500kg
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, navigation, Bluetooth, dual-zone air, reversing camera, rear parking sensors, alarm and 18-inch alloys. Aspire adds sunroof, leather, heated front seats, power tailgate, forward collision warning system and adaptive cruise control
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 41%; 5yr: 28%

compare with...

Mazda CX-5, Ford Kuga, Subaru Forester, Lexus RX450h, Volvo XC60

MITSUBISHI **ASX** FROM **$24,990**



Mitsubishi's ASX (it stands for Active Smart Crossover) base 2.0-litre petrol/five-speed manual front-wheel drive is $24,990. With a continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission, it's $26,990. The 2WD Aspire, with CVT, is $31,490. The AWD Aspire is $33,490.

The ASX all-wheel-drive 2.2-litre turbodiesel/six-speed automatic is $31,990; in Aspire specification, it's $36,490.

ASX is based on the Outlander. However, its body is shorter and interior space is tighter.

The ASX is light, and with a torquey turbodiesel doing the honours — the same engine used in the Outlander — performance will be more than adequate. The previous model's 1.8 turbodiesel did the job easily; this one has 60Nm more torque.

The ASX can feel a touch harsh and loose at times. Its dynamics are not as composed or as comfortable as a Kia Sportage, Subaru Forester or VW Tiguan, though Mitsubishi claimed to have tweaked the suspension on the mid-2013 update.

Mitsubishi's depressing sludge grey plastic dominates the ASX interior. It's an efficient, easy-to-read layout though.

The firm driver's seat is small and unsupportive for larger people.

Rear-seat legroom is on par with a similarly sized hatchback.

There's not a lot of boot space either, but the rear seat backs flip down for an extended floor of nearly 1.6 metres.

The update also includes some useful family friendly features, such as a rear camera, Isofix child seat anchors, and voice control and audio streaming.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★½☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ 2.2-litre turbodiesel is refined and efficient
- ✔ Aspire is loaded with standard features
- ✔ Easy-to-use dash and control layout
- ✔ Mitsubishi's market-leading warranty
- ✔ Easy to drive and park in town

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Why does the cabin have to be so morbidly grey?
- ✘ Dynamics are only average
- ✘ Seats aren't particularly comfortable or supportive
- ✘ Space-saver spare

SPEX (2.2 turbodiesel)

- Made in Japan
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 3500rpm/360Nm of torque from 1500-2750rpm
- 0-100km/h: N/A
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.1L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 153gkm. The 2.0-litre petrol CVT AWD averages 6.8L/100km, 10.5L/100km and 192gkm
- Warranty: Five years/130,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, cruise control, automatic air, CD player with USB input, Bluetooth, rear parking sensors and 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Holden Trax, Hyundai ix35, Subaru XV, VW Tiguan

NISSAN **JUKE** FROM **$22,090**



The Nissan Juke range starts at $22,090 for the front-wheel-drive ST, with a naturally aspirated 86kW 1.6-litre petrol engine, matched with a five-speed manual. A continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) adds $2400. The Juke ST-S, at $28,490, has a six-speed manual and no CVT option.

Top-of-the-range Juke Ti-S, priced at $32,490 (as tested), has switchable front- or all-wheel drive and runs the same 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine as the Pulsar SSS, with 140kW of power and 240Nm of torque. The CVT transmission is standard.

The 1.6 turbo has plenty of stick once it has a few revs on board, but from a standing start the boost arrives in a rush at about 3000rpm so the CVT transmission, though very smooth in operation, takes a little while to harness it and turn it into meaningful forward progress. Eco mode kills performance completely.

The 1.6 turbo is thirsty too, and both engines require premium unleaded.

The Ti-S Juke has independent rear suspension and corners quite tidily; other models have a torsion beam axle. Ride comfort is OK at highway speeds; around town, though, you feel every zit in the road and the Juke can become tiresome.

Rear seat space is tight, even by the fairly squeezy standards of this class. The boot is also tiny.

It's difficult to make a convincing case for the Juke. Most rivals offer you greater space and practicality, a refined, frugal drivetrain and more coherent styling. The Nissan has arrived late to the game and it feels like it.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★½☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Base model is cheap
- ✔ Ti-S is well equipped
- ✔ 1.6 turbo goes hard
- ✔ CVT is smooth
- ✔ Tidy handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Turbo and CVT lag from a standing start
- ✘ Torque steer
- ✘ Choppy ride
- ✘ No reach adjustment for steering wheel
- ✘ Tight back seat and boot space

SPEX

- Made in the UK
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/CVT/front- or all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 5600rpm/240Nm of torque from 2000-5200rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.0L/100km highway; 9.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 169gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth audio streaming, cruise with speed limiter; Ti-S adds touch screen infotainment, rear camera, variable wipers, auto headlights, navigation, heated front seats and part leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...

Ford EcoSport, Holden Trax, Mitsubishi ASX

NISSAN **PULSAR** FROM **$19,290**



Nissan Australia had to drop the popular Pulsar nameplate in 2006 when head office in Japan, despite the pleas of its Australian subsidiary to keep what was a best-selling moniker, insisted its new small car be called the Tiida. And didn't that work a treat. Not.

When the car was reintroduced here in late 2012, it was initially a success, however it has since struggled, so Nissan has responded with pretty aggressive pricing and drive-away deals.

The base ST sedan, tested here, was being advertised as we went to press for just $19,990 drive-away. Given that the Pulsar is one of the largest cars in this class, easily capable of serving as a family car, it's a bargain indeed.

An added attaraction is capped price servicing for up to six years or 120,000 kilometres.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

Sure, the base Pulsar is no great shakes to drive, but it's solid, reliable, competent and well-built.

The $19,990 ST, like all sedan models, runs a 1.8-litre petrol engine, carried over from the Tiida, with a six-speed manual.

A continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) adds $2300. The ST-L, with more gear, is $23,690/$25,890 while the Ti, with the CVT as standard, is $29,990.

The 1.8-litre Pulsar hatch costs $19,290 or $21,590 with CVT. The ST-L is $22,590/$24,890.

A toey, frugal 1.6-litre turbopetrol engine, with 140kW of power, is fitted to the Pulsar ST-S hatchback, which costs $25,490 with a six-speed manual and $28,090 with a CVT transmission. This drivetrain is also used in the SSS hatch.

The Pulsar is light for its size, so although the 1.8's power and torque figures are low by class standards, the car gets along OK, assisted by quite short gearing in the manual to compensate for its lack of grunt.

It's a noisy engine, though, especially on a highway cruise at 100-110km/h, where excessive vibration can also be felt through the steering wheel.

Fuel economy is average for this class, and the 1.8 runs on regular unleaded.

The manual has an acceptably light, precise action. I'd suggest that the CVT should work well with this engine, given Nissan's long experience with CVT transmissions.

The Pulsar is no sports car but it feels quite secure and stable on the road. The suspension, as is usually the case now, is relatively firm, without overly compromising ride comfort on the base model's tall tyres.



The electric power steering is over-assisted, imprecise and has zero feel.

Most of the essentials are standard in the base ST, apart from a USB connection for your iPod and a rear camera.

The dash is elegant, efficient and done in quality materials where it counts. It's an attractive, bright interior that will offend no one.

A generously padded, supportive driver's seat has reasonable travel, however the steering wheel needs greater reach adjustment for taller drivers. Vision is clear around the car.

Plenty of space is a major attraction in the Pulsar sedan. Four tall adults can travel comfortably in it, with vast legroom in the back seat.

The boot is huge (slightly larger than a Commodore sedan) and there's a full-size spare underneath the floor.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ At $19,990 drive away you can't go wrong
- ✔ Family-sized interior
- ✔ Reasonable performance and economy
- ✔ Should be grief-free to own
- ✔ Big boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Engine's noisy and buzzy
- ✘ No USB connection in base model
- ✘ Remote-control steering
- ✘ Doesn't like tight corners much

SPEX (ST manual)
- Made in Thailand
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 96kW of power at 6000rpm/174Nm of torque at 4800rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.7L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city; 91 octane regular, CO^2 emissions are 169gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloys, Bluetooth; ST-L adds USB, colour media screen; Ti adds 17-inch alloys, navigation, Bluetooth audio streaming, leather insert upholstery, tinted rear glass
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 34%

compare with...
Holden Cruze, Honda Civic, Hyundai Elantra, Kia Cerato, Mitsubishi Lancer

NISSAN **ALTIMA** FROM **$29,990**



If you're shopping the big sedan field and looking for an alternative to Falcon/Commodore/Camry/Aurion, the base-model Nissan Altima ST, which comes in at a sharp $29,990, is worth a drive.

It runs a 127kW, 2.5-litre atmo petrol/CVT drivetrain (also used in the X-Trail) and includes the basics, apart from a rear camera. The ST-L, at $35,990, is also good value, adding the camera plus navigation, Bose audio, smartphone connectivity, a seven-inch colour infotainment display, parking sensors at both ends and a few strips of cowhide.

The top-spec Ti, at $40,490, is loaded, (18-inch alloys, blind spot and lane departure warnings, surround camera and power rear-window blind) but you can buy a 3.6-litre V6 Holden VF Calais for $100 less and you'd be mad if you didn't. The same goes for the top-of-the-range Altima Ti-S, with Nissan's signature VQ35 3.5-litre V6, also matched with a CVT. Given the limitations of front-wheel drive in a biggish car, the VQ is tuned for a relatively modest 183kW here and at $45,490, the Ti-S is hardly compelling.

The Maxima sits at the big end of this class, on the same 2775mm wheelbase as the Camry/Aurion, but at just 1435kg the ST is light for a car of this size so the 2.5-litre four does the job with surprising ease on 91 octane. It's flattered by the CVT. Squeeze the pedal and it immediately pins the required revs, giving the 2.5 a sense of midrange urge and responsiveness it would not possess with a conventional automatic. It's also quiet and impeccably smooth.

So is the Altima's ride/handling compromise. On the ST's 16-inch alloys/60 aspect ratio rubber (and the ST-L's 17s/55), comfort and compliance are excellent and road noise is efficiently isolated. Dynamics are mediocre, but in a fit-for-purpose context, the Altima has few noteworthy vices apart from those endemic to the class: some initial body roll, over-assisted, remote-control steering and the occasional bottoming out of the front end if you hit a particularly vicious pothole.

The Thai-built Altima displays fit, finish and materials quality comparable with a Made in Japan model, and the dash layout is simple, formal and efficient, however there's little differentiation between grades. On the launch, we had to check the spec in each car to ascertain what we were driving.

Nissan claims its "Zero Gravity" driver's seat was designed using ergonomic research from NASA. If that ain't a sales pitch to its US heartland, I don't know what is. Still, the driver's pew is comfortable, albeit bereft of upper-body support when cornering.

You would be an unhappy astronaut in the back seat. Though spacious enough, it's saggy in the cushion and has an excessively angled backrest. The boot's huge and on all models apart from Ti you get a full-size spare on an alloy wheel.

Mazda's 6 has this class shot to bits at present, but the Altima ST/ST-L are also worth a look if you're after space, refinement and reliability in a value-for-money package.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ ST/ST-L are well priced; ST-L is generously equipped
- ✔ Excellent ride comfort and refinement
- ✔ Efficient CVT and a 91-octane thirst
- ✔ Plenty of space
- ✔ Made in Japan quality

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Top-spec models are way overpriced
- ✘ Uncomfortable back seat
- ✘ Overassisted steering
- ✘ Soft front end

SPEX (ST)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 127kW of power at 6000rpm/230Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 10.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 174gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: ST includes six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone air, automatic headlights, Bluetooth phone, USB port
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Holden Malibu, Honda Accord, Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Subaru Liberty, Toyota Camry

NISSAN **LEAF** FROM **$51,490**



The Nissan Leaf is a plug-in electric car — about the size of a Prius — introduced to the market at a hefty $51,490. Nissan has been flogging it for $39,990 drive away, though, which says something about our disdain for electric cars.

Leaf is powered by a 24kWh lithium-ion modular battery/90kW electric motor, which drives the front wheels.

The Leaf has a claimed range of up to 170 kilometres. A more realistic expectation is 100-120 kilometres.

It takes eight hours to recharge from a 15A/240-volt powerpoint, which can be installed in your garage for a few hundred dollars.

The Leaf produces 80kW of power and a hefty 280Nm of torque, the latter from zero revs, so it responds immediately and accelerates like a modern turbodiesel, taking about nine seconds to reach 100km/h. However, it does this in almost complete silence and with eerie smoothness. The Leaf's top speed is 145km/h.

Handling is fine, the electric steering is quite precise and the ride is compliant.

Four adults can travel comfortably, while curtain airbags and child restraint anchors also make the Leaf well suited to carrying kids.

There's plenty of boot space.

As with Mitsubishi's iMieV, the Leaf will be almost worthless as a trade-in. It's resale values are awful now and they are only going to get worse as new electric cars become cheaper. This is a certainty.

As it stands today, a petrol/electric Toyota Prius hybrid is the most cost effective way to do your bit for the planet.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★★	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★☆☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Strong, smooth, silent performance
- ✔ Spacious and comfortable
- ✔ Easy to drive
- ✔ Charge it up for a couple of dollars
- ✔ Uses green-sourced electricity and it's also a true zero-emission car

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Resale values are horrific
- ✘ If you run out of power, you have yourself a very big problem
- ✘ You'll also need another car to use on your holidays

SPEX
- Made in Japan
- Three-phase AC electric motor/24kWh lithium-ion battery/single-reduction gear/front-wheel drive
- 80kW of power/280Nm of torque from zero rpm
- 0-100km/h in approx nine seconds
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, rear camera, air conditioning, 16-inch alloy wheels, touch-screen navigation, USB and auxiliary inputs, Bluetooth
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 31%; 5yr: 21%.

compare with...
Lexus CT200h, Mitsubishi iMieV, Toyota Prius, Holden Volt

NISSAN **PULSAR SSS** FROM **$29,690**



Nissan's Pulsar SSS costs $29,790 with a six-speed manual or $32,390 with a CVT transmission.

The SSS's best attribute is its engine. This 1.6 turbopetrol from Nissan is a beauty, with impressive performance numbers — 140kW of power and 240Nm of torque — allied with excellent fuel efficiency (albeit on premium unleaded) and low emissions.

It's a willing, enjoyable engine to drive, marred only by a note which resembles a sewing machine. The manual box is fine; I'm not sure why anybody would choose the CVT in a so-called sporty hatchback.

The SSS uses the same front strut/rear torsion beam suspension as the rest of the Pulsar range, so it doesn't handle as well as it goes. Quality Continental tyres on 17-inch alloy wheels give it plenty of grip, but it feels top heavy in corners, the electric power steering is imprecise and lifeless, while a rough surface can stretch the suspension's roadholding ability at both ends. Ride comfort is OK and the brakes are shopping trolley average.

The SSS looks tall, boxy and boring, just like your mum's hatch. That's the way it feels from the driver's seat too, because you sit high, with great vision and plenty of adjustability, but nothing at all to suggest any sports intent.

If you're after a sports-flavoured hatch at around $30K, there are several more convincing options than the Pulsar SSS. Try Hyundai's i30SR or Veloster Turbo, Kia's Cerato Koup or Proceed GT or Holden's Cruze SRi-V.

STARS ★★½☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★★	★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★★☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★½☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★½☆☆	★★½☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Powerful, efficient 1.6 turbopetrol engine
- ✔ One of the most spacious cabins in the class
- ✔ Easy-to-use infotainment system
- ✔ Well built and finished
- ✔ Quality tyres

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Overpriced
- ✘ Doesn't handle like a hottish hatch
- ✘ Imprecise clutch
- ✘ Over-assisted steering
- ✘ Unsupportive driver's seat
- ✘ Shopping trolley driving position

SPEX (ST 2.5 petrol CVT)
- Made in Thailand
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 5600rpm/240Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.4L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 185gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels with 205/50 Continental tyres, leather face seats, touch-screen infotainment system, navigation, Bluetooth, USB, rear camera, dual zone air, xenon headlights, body kit
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...
Holden Cruze Sri-V, Hyundai Veloster turbo; Kia Koup

NISSAN **370Z** FROM **$56,930**



Most Japanese manufacturers are reluctant to take on the Europeans with their own A-grade sports cars.

Nissan is a notable exception. It has the mighty GT-R, of course, and its legendary Z coupe — in this case the 370Z.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆	★★☆☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

Nissan axed 370Z prices by more than $13,000 in 2014, and for a car with this sort of performance and pedigree, the Z is now a bargain.

The 3.5-litre V6 VQ engine delivers 245kW at 7000rpm and 363Nm at 5200rpm, matched with a six-speed manual at $56,930 or a seven-speed automatic priced at $59,930.

The Roadster costs $65,930/$68,930 respectively.

The 370 is a bullet, reaching 100km/h in just 5.4 seconds, which is A-grade performance car territory.

The 370 is Japan's version of a muscle car and there's nothing refined about it.

The heavy manual gearbox has an auto blipping action when you shift down a gear. It really works, so even if you have two left feet you can attack a tight bend like a hero, with the right quota of revs guaranteed.

If you're timid, the Z feels a bit like a tractor. Get stuck into it and it becomes more athletic and graceful. The steering is superbly weighted and accurate at speed but the brakes, though powerful when you lean on the pedal, lack feel and initial bite.

The ride is hard but not harsh and the suspension does absorb a nasty surface reasonably efficiently, although cross braces at both ends don't entirely eliminate body flex. Tyre noise from the Yokohamas is excruciatingly loud.

The GT-style seat has good upper body support but the cushion is too short. If you're taller than 180cm you'll also want some more travel.

The 370Z isn't an easy car to drive quickly on first acquaintance. In fact, it's mean and intimidating. Own one, though, and the rewards will surely come.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Japan's muscle car
- ✔ Smokin' performance
- ✔ Flat, sharp handling
- ✔ Excellent value for money

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Going deaf
- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Trying to work out how to plug in your music player
- ✘ Lack of driving position adjustment

SPEX (manual Coupe)
- Made in Japan
- 3.7-litre V6 petrol/six-speed manual/rear-wheel drive
- 245kW of power at 7000rpm; 363Nm of torque at 5200rpm
- 0–100km/h in 5.3 seconds (claimed)
- 7.8L/100km highway; 15.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 249gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, cruise control, in-dash six-stack CD player, Bluetooth, 18-inch alloy wheels, navigation, heated seats, cloth/leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr:43%

compare with...
Audi TTS, BMW 235i, Porsche Cayman

NISSAN **GT-R** FROM **$172,000**



Nissan's GT-R will show its pipes to a Porsche 911 Turbo, a Ferrari 458 or a Lamborghini Gallardo — and you also get $200,000–$300,000 change.

The GT-R costs $172,000. That's an absolute bargain in the supercar context, because the GT-R is certainly one of those.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★½☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★☆☆☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★★	★★★★★
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★★	★★★★☆

Its 3.8-litre twin-turbo V6 engine produces 404kW of power at 6400rpm and 628Nm of torque from 3200–5800rpm.

Drive goes to all wheels with a rear bias and the suspension features adjustable dampers.

The GTR accelerates harder from 3000rpm to 7000rpm than any production car I've driven.

Nissan claims the original model's 0-100km/h time has now been reduced from 3.9 seconds to a staggeringly quick 2.7 seconds.

There's a moment of delay from idle as boost pressure increases, then the Nissan leaps forward, accelerating violently through short second and third gears, driven by an unstoppable rush of torque which can break rear-wheel grip in third.

It's a big beastie but it also feels lighter than its 1.75 tonnes and finely balanced, with none of the front-heavy leadenness of some all-wheel drivers.

Its centre of gravity feels to be about 5cm above the bitumen.

The complex drivetrain is clunky and noisy in town, the ride is punishing and the bespoke Recaro seats have you sitting too high, like you're in a little hatchback.

That said, there is nothing on the market that comes even sort of close to emulating the Nissan's race-ready engineering, unless you can get your hands on a Porsche 911 GT3.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ 0-100km/h in RIGHT NOW!
- ✔ An absolute bargain
- ✔ Mind-blowing performance
- ✔ Incredible grip and traction
- ✔ Electronics don't dominate the drive

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Lawyer's bills
- ✘ Not having a licence
- ✘ The attention
- ✘ No spare
- ✘ Basic, tinny audio

SPEX
- Made in Japan
- 3.8-litre twin turbo V6/six-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 404kW of power at 6400rpm/628Nm of torque from 3200–5800rpm
- 0–100km/h in "around three" seconds
- 8.8L/100km highway; 16.9L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 278gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather/fake suede upholstery, heated front seats, single CD player, dual-zone automatic air, Bluetooth connectivity, Bose sound, 40GB hard disc drive, USB port, navigation, reversing camera, six-piston Brembo front brakes, 20-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...
Aston Martin Vantage S, BMW M4, Porsche 911 GT3

NISSAN **X-TRAIL** FROM **$27,990**



The base Nissan X-Trail ST, at $27,990, is front-wheel drive (dubbed 2WD) and uses a 106kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine available only with a six-speed manual gearbox.

The $30,490 ST gains the gutsy 126kW 2.5-litre unit that has served the series since its 2001 inception, with a Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT, or Xtronic in Nissan-speak), a combination that also powers the rest of the petrol-engined X-Trail range.

An all-wheel-drive (4WD) ST is $33,980, while the mid-spec ST-L Xtronic 2WD is $36,190; 4WD bumps that to $39,080.

Finally there's the flagship $44,680 Ti Xtronic 4WD.

Seven-seater choices are limited for now to the ST Xtronic 2WD from $31,580 and the $37,190 ST-L.

The 96kW/320Nm 1.6-litre turbodiesel X-Trail range opens with the front-wheel-drive CVT TS, at $35,380. The AWD TS (manual only) is $35,680. The front wheel drive CVT TL is $46,280; the AWD TL, also manual only, is $46,580.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆

Since the vast majority of sales are for the 2.4-litre Xtronic, that's the one we're concentrating on. Proven for over a dozen years as a robust and reliable engine in the two previous X-Trails, this 126kW/226Nm four-cylinder petrol unit still manages to deliver competitive performance and sufficient refinement — most of the time.

Much is owed to the new Xtronic CVT, which combines extraordinary smoothness with the appreciably rapid acceleration response of a conventional torque-converter automatic.

While precious little steering feedback means you won't mistake the X-Trail for a BMW, the helm imparts a sense of weight, linearity and control. At higher speeds, the chassis feels agile yet planted, especially driving through sweeping bends.

When the turns get tighter, though, there's no escaping the X-Trail's high centre of gravity, with lots of body lean and plenty of extra steering effort required. Strong brakes are a bonus, as is the supple ride on the standard 17-inch wheel and tyre package. However, the Ti's 18-inch setup — though more surefooted — makes the X-Trail feel a tad too firm over some bumps, while they can transfer quite a bit more road noise inside the cabin.

The cabin also features efficient ventilation, VW-style clear instrumentation (with a digital auxiliary speedo at last, as well as a comprehensive trip-computer display), plenty of storage options and simple, intuitive controls that help with finding a perfect driving position.

Thought, too, has been given to the design of the elevated and comfortable rear seat, which works for people of all ages and sizes. Not only does each of the 40:20:40 backrests recline by a few degrees, they also slide forward individually as desired — great for parents who need to be within arms reach of their children sitting behind.

Along with adequate ventilation and even more storage options, the rear seat features a pair of ISOFIX seat anchors, backed up by backrest-sited child-seat tether hooks.

Access to the third row (where fitted) in seven-seater models is easy, however the 50:50 split-fold bench is strictly for smaller kids only.

In five-seaters, the large boot features a "Divide-'N-Hide" configurable multi-level arrangement; with a pair of luggage dividers, it allows for varying ways to store different things without them touching or falling over. A plastic-lined wet storage area is beneath the carpeted cargo-area floor. The Ti has a power tailgate.

The previous X-Trail was one of the most versatile, family-friendly wagons in its class. So is this one; the fact that it's a much better drive makes it a "must add" to your test drive list.

By Byron Mathioudakis



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ CVT's responsiveness and efficiency
- ✔ Reverse camera standard
- ✔ Spacious, refined cabin
- ✔ Seven-seat availability
- ✔ Class-leading rear-seat and load-area versatility

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No manual transmission with the bigger 2.5 engine
- ✘ Firm ride on Ti's 18-inch wheel/tyre package
- ✘ Foot-operated park brake is a 1950s throwback
- ✘ Some road-noise intrusion
- ✘ Steering could still use more feedback and feel

SPEX (ST 4WD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5L four-cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 126kW of power at 6000rpm/226Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in N/A
- 6.6L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 192gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, hill start assist, rear camera, Bluetooth phone and audio streaming, USB connectivity, 17-inch alloy wheels; DT-L adds navigation, digital radio, surround-view monitor, leather, heated front seats, dual-zone air, roof rails and rear tinted glass; Ti adds lane departure warning, blind-spot monitoring, power tailgate, sunroof and 18-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Holden Captiva, Honda CRV, Mitsubishi Outlander, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4

NISSAN **QASHQAI** FROM **$25,850**



Anthropologists know it as a nomadic people of Middle Eastern origin, but Nissan hopes "Qashqai" (pronounced "kash-kai") becomes the byword for compact SUVs in Australia.

Like the successful Dualis it replaces, the five-seater crossover is designed, engineered and built in Britain as a higher-riding alternative to the Pulsar.

Despite sharing similar styling and engine choices with its predecessor, the Qashqai improves in key areas.

For starters, it is longer and wider, with a wheelbase stretch aimed at significantly boosting rear-seat legroom and cargo space — two Dualis weaknesses.

Progress is also evident in the dash design, thanks to crisp and comprehensive instruments, excellent ventilation, logical and easy-to-use touchscreen switchgear and ample storage spaces.

Yet the appealingly snug ambience of old has been retained despite the welcome space increases, backed up by supportive seats and quality finishes.

Qashqai is front-wheel drive all the way, due to very low all-wheel drive uptake on the Dualis — a step back in our view.

Petrol-powered versions retain the Dualis' trusty old 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol unit.

Now with variable valve timing and direct injection, it produces slightly more power and torque, available at lower revs for improved low-speed response.

Paired to either a six-speed manual or CVT (continuously variable transmission), off-the-line pick up is adequate rather than sparkling, but the 2.0-litre perks up considerably as speeds rise without the thrashy harshness found previously.

Credit goes to Nissan's latest-generation CVT, since it reacts faster and more naturally to throttle inputs, without the laggy, droning characteristics that blight some other similar transmissions.

If the budget allows, the newer 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel is the better bet.

With 96kW at 4000rpm and 320Nm at 1750rpm, and mated solely to the CVT, the Renault-supplied direct-injection common-rail engine offers significantly stronger mid-range performance with minimal throttle delay and virtually no clatter entering the cabin.

Load the Nissan with extra people and luggage and the turbodiesel comes into its own, pulling away with an effortless ease quite foreign to the petrol version.

Tuned for European markets, the Qashqai's chassis marks a sizeable step forward compared to the Dualis.

Featuring a revised MacPherson strut front and multi-link independent rear-suspension system, the (electrically actuated) steering responds with eager linearity, though it isn't especially big on driver feedback.

Furthermore, the Qashqai remains planted and composed when pushed hard into corners, displaying an agility that's quite unexpected in a compact SUV. The consequence is a pretty firm ride on less than perfectly surfaced roads in the 19-inch wheeled Ti and TL variants.

The Qashqai ST manual kicks off from $25,850 or $28,490 for the CVT. Standard features include six airbags, stability control, hills-start assist, cruise control, a reverse camera, ISOFIX child-seat latches, Bluetooth phone and audio streaming, a leather-clad steering wheel, 17-inch alloys and roof bars.

The $33,200 TS CVT diesel's price premium nets it a seamless stop/start function, push-button start, rain-sensing wipers, fog lights, dual-zone air and a useful cargo-separation system among other goodies.

Stepping up to the $34,990 Ti petrol/$37,990 TL diesel adds Sat-Nav, sunroof, leather, heated front seats, auto parking, a surround-view camera and new-to-series technologies including blind spot warning, lane departure warning, moving object detection and high beam assist.

However, the company has copped flak for omitting the Autonomous Emergency Braking function available in Europe that can automatically slow or even stop the car to avoid an impact.

Nevertheless, as Nissan's second-generation compact SUV contender, the Qashqai builds upon its predecessor's strengths of style, comfort and ease with improved driveability, media connectivity and cabin space. Worth a drive.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ Classy, inviting interior
- ✔ Diesel's fuel efficiency
- ✔ Extended servicing intervals with capped pricing
- ✔ Decent dynamics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No all-wheel drive availability
- ✘ Petrol engine needs more oomph
- ✘ Diesel is a costly stepup
- ✘ Ride is firm on Ti and TL
- ✘ Steering could use more feel

SPEX (2.0L CVT)

- Made in England
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed CVT/front-wheel drive
- 106kW of power at 6000rpm/200Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 159g/km
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, hill-start assist, reversing camera, ISOFIX child-seat latches, Bluetooth phone and audio streaming, a leather-clad steering wheel, 17-inch alloy wheels and roof bars.

* Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Ford Kuga, Hyundai ix35, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Skoda Yeti, VW Tiguan

NISSAN **PATHFINDER** FROM **$39,990**



Nissan's current Pathfinder abandons its predecessors' go-anywhere 4x4 brief and instead is pitched squarely at the suburban SUV buyer seeking a comfortable, safe, seven-seater family wagon.

The base Pathfinder ST front-wheel drive is $39,990, the ST-L is $50,490 and the Ti is $60,790. Top-of-the-range Ti all-wheel drive, as tested, is a hefty $60,990.

A 3.5-litre V6 petrol/CVT (continuously variable automatic transmission) drivetrain is standard. All models are available with front-wheel drive or part-time all-wheel drive, the latter adding $4100-$4300.

Like its closest rivals, the Toyota Kluger and Mazda CX5, the Pathfinder offers no turbodiesel option.

Instead, there's a hybrid, in keeping with the Pathfinder's American market brief. A 2.5-litre supercharged petrol four is mated to a small 15kW electric motor and CVT transmission.

Combined outputs are 188kW and 330Nm, with a claimed fuel consumption average of 8.4L/100km for the base front wheel drive ST, which costs $42,990. The all-wheel drive ST-L is $57,490; Ti is $68,090.

In the 3.5-litre V6 Pathfinder, the CVT wastes revs from a standing start and takes a few seconds to engage properly when you put your foot down; under power, the V6, though reasonably smooth, is also a breathy, dull engine with this much weight to drag around, and as the revs climb it begins to show and feel its age. It can be savagely thirsty, too, using well over 15L/100km at times. Even gentle highway cruising will return 10L/100km.

The cruise control does not hold your set speed properly and is slow to react to changing terrain. It lets the revs die on hills, then struggles to regain momentum.

The suspension is tuned for American tastes, so ride comfort and refinement are outstanding, but you get no feedback at all from the over-assisted, imprecise steering and in tight corners the Pathfinder is a barge. That said, on rough country roads the Nissan feels securely planted and safe. It's also as quiet as a luxury wagon.

The Pathfinder is one of the biggest wagons in the class. Interior space, comfort and versatility are its strengths. The driver in Ti sits in a leather-faced, heated and cooled seat that's long in the cushion, very comfortable and supportive, though a few tall drivers will want more seat travel. All models have three-zone air conditioning with vents for all rows.

The 60/40 split middle row is comfortable, however the seat is quite narrow so two will fit more comfortably than three and adults sit knees-up, with adequate but not particularly generous legroom, even when the seat is pushed right back to the limit of its adjustment. The backrest angle is adjustable and there's plenty of storage here too.

Either side of the row-two seat folds and slides in one easy action to provide unobstructed access to the two individual row-three seats, which fold up out of the floor. They're fine for kids; adults will have to squat, but by back stalls standards these are relatively spacious.

Any way you arrange it, Pathfinder's load capacity is generous, but the spare is a space-saver. If you're taller than 180cm, you'll also whack your head on the open tailgate.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★½☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★☆☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Spacious, practical, versatile interior
- ✔ Comfortable, quiet ride on any surface
- ✔ Well built and finished
- ✔ Ti is loaded with gear
- ✔ Roomy row-three stalls with easy access

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ ST-L and Ti are far too expensive
- ✘ Dull, slow, thirsty petrol V6
- ✘ CVT wastes revs and time before engaging properly
- ✘ Over-assisted steering
- ✘ Cruise control doesn't work properly

SPEX

- Made in the USA
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/CVT/front- or all-wheel drive
- 190kW of power at 6400rpm/325Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 8.1L/100km highway; 13.5L/100km city; 91 octane. CO^2 emissions are 240gkm
- Max towing weight 2700kg
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Pathfinder ST includes seven airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloys, tri-zone air, tyre pressure monitoring, automatic headlights, rear parking sensors, Bluetooth and roof rails
- ST-L adds heated front seats, leather seat facings and trim, front and rear sunroofs
- Ti adds a power tailgate, surround cameras, 20-inch alloy wheels, Bose audio, navigation, DVD screens and 9gb of music storage
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 50%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Toyota Kluger

PEUGEOT **208** FROM **$18,490**



Peugeot dropped the ball with its previous two small cars bearing the 2 designation, the 206 and 207. They were pretty to look at but also shoddily built and unreliable.

The 208 is a much better effort. It delivers key attributes which Peugeot owners love — notably outstanding comfort and a smooth, composed ride — while also taking a big leap forward in the quality of materials and assembly in the cabin, where its predecessors had more squeaks and rattles than a child care centre.

The 208 range opens with the 60kW 1.2-litre three-cylinder petrol/five-speed manual Active five-door hatch at $18,490.

The 88kW 1.6-litre/four-speed automatic Active is $21,490.

The Allure 1.6/five-speed manual is $21,990, the auto is $23,990 and the Allure auto Premium is $26,490.

The three-door 115kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual Allure Sport is also $26,490.

STARS ★★½☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★½☆☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★½☆☆

The 208 wagon starts at $21,990 for the 1.2-litre manual Active. The 1.6-litre auto is $24,990. Allure 1.6 manual is $27,990; auto is $29,990. Outdoor 1.6-litre turbodiesel manual is $31,990.

I tested the base-model 1.2-litre Active hatch. It uses a three-cylinder engine to achieve low fuel consumption and emissions results. It's not a particularly convincing result in the Australian context.

Our driving styles are quite different to Europe, where the 1.2 is designed to work best. Our traffic speeds in cities are relatively high; on highways they are relatively low. In Europe, the opposite applies.

So the 1.2, with no turboboost to help its cause, lacks the strong pulling power and responsiveness required to hold its own in the cut and thrust of Sydney traffic.

You have to slip the clutch at times to get it off the line because first gear is tall.

The lack of a hill-holder makes takeoffs doubly fraught. Bottom-end response is feeble and at times the engine also surges erratically.

Out on the highway, the 1.2 runs smoothly and quietly. It dies on any decent hill, though, and acceleration is, shall we say, incremental.

Peugeot has rediscovered the art of suspension tuning and the 208 is superb on rough roads, where it sits with the authority and comfort of a larger car.

It pushes the front end hard in tight corners, and there's some body roll, too.

The driver sits in a luxurious seat, facing an elegant, avant-garde dash layout with the instruments located on top of the dash and a large touch screen for audio and communication functions in the centre. Peugeot has ditched the CD player; Bluetooth and USB connectivity are provided.

The touch screen works well and information is displayed clearly and logically.

Unfortunately, though, some drivers will find that the tiny steering wheel obscures their view of the instruments, which is very dumb design.



You have to sit high, with the wheel down in your lap, to see the entire instrument display.

The 208's rear seat is pretty tight. It will take a couple of kids easily, though, and the boot is relatively large. There's a full-size spare under the floor.

The 208 has its attractions, but at the price there are better cars out there. Try the new Mazda2, Honda Jazz, VW Polo, Renault Clio or Kia Rio.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Smooth ride on rough roads
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✔ Stylish, quality cabin
- ✔ Decent boot space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Weak performance exacerbated by too tall gearing
- ✘ Getting it off the line is a tedious business
- ✘ Steering wheel can obscure instruments
- ✘ Peugeot's reliability can be questionable
- ✘ Resale values aren't great

SPEX (1.2 Active)

- Made in France
- 1.2-litre three-cylinder petrol/five-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 60kW of power at 5750rpm/118Nm of torque at 2750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 13.9 secs (claimed)
- 4.1L/100km highway; 5.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 109gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 15-inch steel wheels, seven-inch touch-screen audio/Bluetooth, USB, heated, folding door mirrors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 37%

compare with...

Mazda2, Renault Clio, VW Polo

PEUGEOT **208GTI** FROM **$29,990**



Peugeot created something of a legend with its 1984-1994 205GTi hot hatch. So much so that whenever successive 206 and 207 models have been compared to it, they have, fairly or otherwise, inevitably been found inferior.

Now it's the 208GTi's turn.

Priced at $29,990, the 208 runs the BMW/PSA 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine. Here, it produces 147kW of power and 275Nm of torque, the latter from 1700rpm. This is more than enough to shift the 208's lithe 1160kg along with ease. It's claimed to reach 100km/h in 6.8 seconds, which is certainly believable.

A six-speed manual gearbox is standard; there's no automatic option. Drive goes to the front wheels. All four are 17-inchers shod with 205/45 Bridgestone Potenza RE050 tyres. The suspension is a lowered, stiffened version of the standard 208 setup, so the rear is still a torsion beam axle. Anti-roll bars, the front subframe and chassis cross members have been strengthened, while larger discs are fitted and the electric steering assistance has been decreased.

The 1.6 is a sweet engine, with plenty of flexibility in the lower half of the rev range. However, it really likes to rev and between 4000-6000rpm, assisted by close ratios in the six-speed, it offers strong performance and excellent response at the pedal. The six-speed's action is light and acceptably precise.

Dynamics are excellent on smooth roads. The still slightly-over-assisted steering isn't particularly direct, so you need to put some lock on the tiny, leather-wrapped wheel to get the Peugeot pointed. It pushes the front end quite hard and there's some tyre slip and squeal fairly early in the piece, but lift off momentarily mid corner and the nose tucks in nicely to the line you want.

The suspension is very firm, so while body control is fine, the GTi is pretty awful on a typical country road. Hits at both ends, especially the rear, give the body a hammering so the ride is uncomfortable; there's some body shake, an assortment of chirps and squeaks in the cabin and tyre noise is excessive.

Hot hatches aren't designed to be luxurious or refined, but on a long country drive the GTi is hard work.

It has the same stupid instrument panel arrangement as the regular 208, so if you like the steering wheel positioned anywhere but in your lap, you can't actually see the dials or the information screen between them because they are obscured.

Otherwise, though, the GTi interior is beautifully designed, especially the groovy touch-screen infotainment system, the real metal gear lever, black to red look on the doors and dash trim, and the red wraparound lighting on the instruments.

A full-body-wrap sports seat can be a touch squeezy on the pelvis; skinny people will be more comfortable. Back-seat space is tight, but a couple of adults can survive a cross-town trip. The boot is large and has a full-size spare underneath.

There's a lot of new-model action in this class at present. The pick of them is probably Ford's Fiesta ST — which is also $4000 cheaper than the 208 — but you should also go for a burn in the VW Polo GTi and Renault's Clio RS200.



STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★☆☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★☆☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The 1.6 is a hoot
- ✔ Agile, tactile dynamics
- ✔ Looks gorgeous
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ Full-size spare
- ✔ Strong, fade-free brakes

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Squeaks and rattles in the cabin
- ✘ Steering wheel obscures instruments
- ✘ Excessive tyre noise

SPEX

- Made in France
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 5500rpm/275Nm of torque at 1700rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.8 seconds (claimed)
- 4.7L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 139gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, leather-faced seats, touch-screen navigation, Bluetooth, two USB ports, cruise control with speed limiter, dual-zone air, tinted glass and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Ford Fiesta ST, Renault Clio RS200, VW Polo GTi

PEUGEOT **308** FROM **$21,990**



Peugeot has a long but patchy history in Australia, and, like other French brands, its quality and reliability record is far from reassuring. But, having been voted European Car of the Year for 2014, the latest 308 could be a real turnaround car.

Priced from $21,990, the second-generation 308 shares nothing with what's come before, as a result of an all-new architecture that was unashamedly inspired by Volkswagen's Golf.

Shedding some 140kg, the new 308 is slightly shorter than before, but roomier inside thanks to a sizeable wheelbase stretch.

Like the little 208, it features Peugeot's controversial high-instrumentation/low-steering-wheel driving position. Designed to raise safety and lower fatigue by cutting eye movement between the road and speedo, some drivers will find that with the steering wheel and seat positioned to their liking, their view of the instrument panel is partially obscured. Check this if you're looking at a 308 in the showroom.

Peugeot claims a sizeable uplift in quality, including four million kilometres of testing and 15,000 hours of endurance testing. Space, seat comfort and ease of access are further 308 highlights.

On the downside, the thick pillars can obscure vision, the tachometer's needle swings the wrong way, the single cup holder is useless and there are no rear-seat air vents.

There is no seven-seater configuration for the (longer wheelbase) 308 Touring, which boasts 625 litres of cargo space. A remote lever automatically drops the backrests to up that capacity to 1740 litres.

Matching the fresh chassis is a suite of new or revised engine and gearbox choices.

Perhaps most interesting for now is a 96kW/230Nm, 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol e-THP unit. Quiet, revvy and surprisingly eager, it provides abundant off-the-line acceleration and then has no problem maintaining a rapid pace. That the 1.2-litre also averages 4.6L/100km, on premium unleaded, is also quite remarkable.

The responsive six-speed automatic is the preferable gearbox, since the standard six-speed manual's shift action can be notchy. You'll find it on the base Access, the $27,340 Active and $30,490 Allure hatches.

Two additional turbopetrol 308s are also slated for Australia from March — both with 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engines.

The 110kW/240Nm unit is exclusive to the circa-$33K Allure, $35K Allure Touring and $36K Allure Premium, and is capable of returning 6.5L/100km. For more performance, there is also a 151kW/285Nm version in the range topping GT that is somehow more economical at 5.6L/100km.

Peugeot has things covered on the diesel front, too, thanks to a pair of BlueHDi four-cylinder turbocharged engines: a 110kW/370Nm 1.6-litre and 133kW/400Nm 2.0-litre.

The smaller of the two is a punchy yet frugal performer, bringing spirited acceleration once the tacho heads towards 2000rpm while averaging 4.1L/100km. Prices start from $34,790 in standard Allure guise. The 2.0-litre engine is for the GT.

All engines make the most of an excellent chassis, with its properly weighted and nicely responsive electric power steering, sharp handling and superbly controlled roadholding.

The suspension (struts up front, a torsion beam out back) still provides a smooth and supple ride, with a level of noise damping that puts it among the class leaders.

VW's Golf is still the benchmark car in this class; however, Peugeot is back in the race and the latest 308 should certainly now be on your test drive list.

By Byron Mathioudakis



STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Elegant, spacious design
- ✔ Great 1.2-litre turbopetrol engine
- ✔ Excellent handling and roadholding
- ✔ Brilliant interior presentation
- ✔ Stylish Touring wagon option

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Peugeots can be troublesome
- ✘ No rear-seat air vents
- ✘ Instrument panel can be partially obscured
- ✘ Thick pillars can also obscure vision
- ✘ Rear camera should be standard

SPEX (Peugeot 308 Access)

- Made in France
- 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 96kW of power at 5500rpm/230Nm of torque at 1750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.6 seconds (claimed)
- 3.9L/100km highway; 5.8L/100km city, 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 107gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, Bluetooth, 15-inch steel wheels; Active adds 16-inch alloys, rear parking sensors, automatic air and touch-screen infotainment; Allure includes LED lights, front parking sensors and navigation; Allure Premium brings a blind spot monitor, adaptive cruise, emergency collision braking, automatic parking, rear camera, 17-inch wheels and a glass roof. GT includes 18-inch alloys, sports suspension and paddle shifters.
- Redbook future values (2014 Active auto) 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Ford Focus, Honda Civic, Mazda3, Mercedes A-Class, Volkswagen Golf

PEUGEOT **508** FROM **$36,990**



After it lost the plot with the overweight, under-engineered 407, the 508 sees Peugeot once again delivering what long-time fans of the marque expect from its mainstream sedan and wagon: outstanding comfort, refinement and diesel performance, with a typically French emphasis on luxury, elegant design and value.

The 508 range opens with the 1.6-litre turbopetrol Active sedan at $36,990. This engine, which produces 115kW of power, 240Nm of torque and averages 7.1 litres per 100 kilometres, was developed with BMW and is also used in the Mini. In Allure specification, it's $39,490.

Diesel is Peugeot's forte, and the 508 has two such drivetrains.

The latest iteration of Peugeot's 2.0-litre HDi produces 120kW and 340Nm. It's fitted to the Allure sedan, priced at $42,990.

The top-of-the-line 2.2-litre HDi engine, in the $55,490 508GT, produces 150kW and 450Nm. That's the same power output and 10Nm more torque than that produced by the 2.7-litre V6 turbodiesel used in the old 407.

Touring wagons are also available. The 1.6T Allure Touring is $42,490, the 2.0-litre HDi is $45,990 and the 2.2-litre GT is $58,490. All models are fitted with a six-speed automatic.

A seven-seater variant, the 5008, costs $36,990 with the 1.6-litre turbopetrol/auto, or $40,490 with the 2.0-litre turbodiesel/auto drivetrain.

The 2.2-litre in the 508 GT is one of the best diesels around. It's exceptionally refined and has a turbo-lag-free immediacy in the way it responds to the pedal. The six-speed auto is a perfect fit.

The 508's suspension is still soft because that's the way the French like their sedans, so dynamics are the antithesis of sporty. It still rolls into a corner, but body movement is reasonably well controlled and once the car settles down, it's properly balanced.

Electro-hydraulic steering, though lacking in feel, is accurate and intuitive.

Despite the GT's double-wishbone front end (other variants have MacPherson struts), some rack shake is evident on rough bitumen, which can also induce a choppy, harsh ride. A series of big hits can also stretch the lightly damped front end's roadholding capability.

Up front, the GT's firm, leather-wrapped seat offers good support and comfort. You could almost be sitting in an Audi because the German brand's design cues are everywhere on the dash and around the cabin.

Back-seat space is pretty tight, though, for a car of this size, which does compromise the 508's appeal.

Four tall adults will find the cabin very squeezy compared with rivals such as VW's Passat.

Boot space is generous and a temporary spare is underneath.

There were no problems in the test car, but be aware that Peugeots can be troublesome. For some inexplicable reason the French just can't seem to deliver consistent quality and reliability.

There are some good-value-for-money contenders in the mid-size sedan class.

I'd suggest test driving the 508 against the Skoda Octavia, Volvo's S60 and VW's Passat.

And if you're not a Euro badge slave, a drive in the Hyundai i40 or Mazda6 may be enlightening. Both are also available with petrol and diesel drivetrains.

An facelifted 508 range, including infotainment upgrades and fuel efficiency tweaks, is due in showrooms shortly.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ GT is sharp value
- ✔ 2.2 turbodiesel punch, refinement and economy
- ✔ Beautiful interior
- ✔ Comfortable ride and competent dynamics
- ✔ All models are well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Peugeots can be temperamental
- ✘ Lack of steering feel and rack shake
- ✘ Tight rear-seat space

SPEX (GT)

- Made in France
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 150kW of power at 3500rpm/450Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.2 seconds (claimed)
- 4.4L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 150gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 18-inch alloys, quad-zone air, shift paddles, front and rear parking sensors with available space measurement, Bluetooth, USB connectivity, swivelling bi-xenon headlights, fixed-price servicing
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Skoda Octavia, VW Passat, Volvo S60

PEUGEOT **RCZ** FROM **$58,990**



One price applies to all three variants of Peugeot's RCZ: $58,990. There's a 147kW 1.6-litre twin-scroll turbopetrol/six-speed manual (a drivetrain that BMW also uses in the Mini Cooper S), a 115kW 1.6-litre turbo/six-speed automatic or a 120kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel with a six-speed manual.

The RCZ doesn't try to be a hard-case sports car, but it's light, so the smooth, elastic, 147kW 1.6-litre has no problem shifting it to 100km/h in a respectable 7.5 seconds.

Peugeot always delivers an A-grade diesel; the 2.0 takes 8.2 seconds to reach 100km/h. There's no six-speed auto available with this engine. The RCZ won't see which way an Audi S3 or a BMW 2 Series coupe went, but in the tight stuff it will keep a Golf GTi honest.

The RCZ-R, at $68,990, features a 199kW version of the 1.6, with 330kW of torque also available from 1900-5500rpm. It still puts this to the road via the front wheels, though, which does seem ambitious. An all-wheel drivetrain is surely needed.

The RCZ's steering is informative and intuitive and the ride, on standard 18-inch alloys, is comfortable and compliant.

The cabin is beautifully styled and the front seats are luxuriously comfortable. Back seat space is tight, of course.

Any Peugeot test still comes with a health warning: acceptable quality and reliability are not necessarily included in the deal.

Peugeot remains a tail-ender in independently run owner-satisfaction surveys.

You pay your money and you take your chances. At least the RCZ is an engaging, well-sorted machine.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet rated	★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★½	★★★½☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★½☆	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Looks twice as expensive as it costs
- ✔ Strong, refined performance in the manual version
- ✔ Loaded with equipment
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Useful boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Reliability may be an issue
- ✘ Automatic version will be pretty slow
- ✘ No spare

SPEX (1.6 turbo manual)
- Made in Austria
- 1.6-litre, four-cylinder, turbo/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 5500rpm/275Nm of torque at 1700rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 9.1L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO_2 emissions are 159gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, four airbags, leather upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone automatic air, Bluetooth, USB connectivity, front and rear parking sensors, automatic headlights and wipers.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...
Audi S3, BMW 2 Series Coupe, VW Scirocco R

PORSCHE **PANAMERA** FROM **$204,600**



Porsche's Panamera range has been supplemented by a radical plug-in hybrid for 2015, while the 4.8-litre atmo V8 has been replaced in S and GT models by Audi's twin-turbo 3.0-litre V6, in the name of fuel efficiency and lower emissions.

The 184kW 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic, with 221kW/650Nm, a claimed 0-100km/h time of just 6.0 seconds and average consumption of just 6.4L/100km, is $208,400.

The 220kW 3.6-litre petrol V6/seven-speed auto is $204,600, while the all-wheel-drive version is $216,800.

The 309kW 3.0-litre twin-turbopetrol Panamera S is $288,900.

The all-wheel-drive Panamera 4S GT is $301,100, the 324kW 4.8-litre V8 all-wheel drive GTS is $320,100 and the twin-turbo 368kW all-wheel-drive 4.8-litre Turbo is $383,400.

The e-Hybrid GT is $299,200. Porsche claims average consumption is an amazing 3.1L/100km.

The 4.8-litre V8 in the GTS, lacks the effortless idle to redline pulling power that's now a given in this class.

Audi's twin-turbo 3.0-litre V6 doesn't have that problem. It delivers immedite and forceful urge from idle to redline.

The diesel is a wonderful engine but, like the rest of them, it's extravagantly priced. You can get a similar drivetrain in the Audi A7 and save more than $50,000.

The Turbo actually has too much performance to use on the road. At the track, though, it would leave any comparably-sized sedan in its wake.

STARS ★★½☆☆☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆	★★½☆☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★☆☆	★★☆☆☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★☆☆	★★½☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Luxurious seats
- ✔ Avant-garde interior design
- ✔ Better resales than rivals
- ✔ The usual superb Porsche brakes

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Peaky V8 lacks torque
- ✘ Seven-speed PDK gearbox gets cranky in traffic
- ✘ Dynamics aren't great on rough roads
- ✘ Rear-seat legroom isn't generous
- ✘ Overpriced

SPEX (GTS V8)
- Made in Germany
- 4.8-litre direct injection V8/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 324kW of power at 6700rpm/520Nm of torque from 3500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.4 seconds (claimed)
- 7.8L/100km highway; 15.7L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 249gkm
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, leather, dual-zone air, front and rear parking sensors, sunroof, bi-xenon headlights, alarm, six-stack CD player, iPod connection, adaptive dampers, 19-inch alloys, power-operated tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

compare with...
Audi A7, BMW Gran Coupe, Jaguar XJ-R, Maserati Quattroporte

PORSCHE **BOXSTER** FROM **$102,800**



It was always going to be intriguing to see how Porsche could top the original Boxster, which lasted for 16 years, but the second generation does indeed take the badge even further to the front of the sports roadster class, where nothing comes close to the Boxster.

Prices start at $102,800 for the 2.7-litre/six-speed manual Boxster. The 3.4-litre six-speed manual Boxster S is $128,900. The seven-speed PDK automated manual transmission adds $4990.

The Boxster manual weighs just 1310kg; the S is 1320kg. PDK adds 30-35kg.

The 981 has many features adapted from the 911, including electromechanical power steering and other fuel-efficiency measures that give it outstanding fuel consumption numbers.

The Boxster runs a 2.7-litre engine, replacing the previous model's 2.9, with 195kW of power and 280Nm of torque. Fuel efficiency has improved by 12.8-15.4 per cent.

The Boxster S retains the previous model's 3.4-litre engine, now with 232kW and 360Nm. Fuel numbers have improved by 10.2-14.9 per cent.

The Boxster hits 100km/h in 5.8 seconds; with the PDK transmission it takes 5.7 seconds. Boxster S' times are 5.1 and 5.0 seconds respectively.

The S, with PDK, as tested is a familiar combination. In normal driving, it goes for the high ratios immediately, and you can cruise around town all day using barely more than 2000rpm, returning well under 10 litres per 100 kilometres.

Get busy, in Sport or optional Sport Plus mode and the engine's throaty hum rises to a hard-edged rasp. It doesn't pull as hard as a turbo below 4500rpm, but from here on the 3.4 loves to rev and it spins hard, with real urgency, all the way to 7800rpm.

As you progress through the different driving modes, the PDK's shifts become quicker and more abrupt, though it is never harsh. In Sport and Sport Plus, the ability to pick when to shift and when to hold a gear is uncanny. Manual mode is almost — but not quite — redundant.

The Boxster is the dynamic benchmark by which all convertibles are judged and usually found wanting.

Beyond its sublime balance, en pointe agility and alchemic togetherness, though, the Boxster's essence is its complete engagement with you, the driver, via the most direct, unadulterated feedback in the business from the wheels at each corner, the one in your hand, and your cheeks on the seat. That's why you don't have to thrash the Porsche to enjoy it. The car feels alive, eager and exhilarating even when you're just soaking up the sunshine and contemplating your good fortune.

In tight corners it's impossible to fault. It bites the bitumen the moment you turn the wheel. Factor in exceptionally controllable, powerful, fade-resistant brakes and you have a car so dynamically capable you begin to wonder if it's possible to do any wrong in it at all.

The softop sits in an open well behind the cockpit. It can be opened or closed at speeds up to 50km/h.

The dash is a bit of a button-fest, with some complex infotainment interfaces, but the important stuff falls perfectly to hand and the driving position feels like it was made specifically for you. Porsche's signature slim, firm driver's seat can get a touch bony after a couple of hours.

Useful-sized compartments are provided at both ends; if you take the space saver option, it lives in the front.

The Boxster still stands up as one of the great cars. Every drive in it is a joy.

STARS ★★★★½

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★½



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Looks better than the original
- ✔ Rev-happy, fuel-efficient engines
- ✔ PDK is the best automated manual there is
- ✔ Stellar handling
- ✔ Comfortable cabin and useful storage at both ends

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Complex dash control layout
- ✘ Driver's seat's pretty firm

SPEX (S PDK)

- Made in Germany
- 3.4–litre flat six petrol/seven-speed automated manual/rear-wheel drive
- 232kW of power at 6700rpm/360Nm of torque from 4500-5800rpm
- 0–100km/h in 5.0 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 11.2L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 188gkm
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, sports seats, leather upholstery, alarm, active bi-xenon headlights, navigation, Bluetooth.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...

Audi TT roadster, BMW Z4, Jaguar F-Type, Mercedes SLK

PORSCHE **911 CARRERA** FROM **$208,600**



Porsche's 991 911 range opens with the 257kW 3.4-litre flat six Carrera coupe, now with a seven-speed manual gearbox, at $208,600. The seven-speed twin-clutch automated manual PDK transmission version is $214,550.

The manual Carrera S coupe, with a 294kW 3.8-litre flat six is $245,200. With the PDK transmission, it's $251,150.

The Carrera Cabriolet, available with both engine/transmission combinations, costs an extra $22,000.

Carrera 4 is $224,300; 4S is $260,900. PDK adds $5950; Cabrio 4s are an extra $22,400.

Carrera GTS, which ups power to 316kW and features Sports Chrono as standard, costs $268,700 for the Carrera2 manual or $284,100 for the Carrera4. Cabriolet versions cost $289,700/$305,300. The PDK transmission adds $7390.

The track-day weapon GT3, pictured, with a 350kW 3.8/PDK, is $293,600. Hopefully, its self combusting problem has been fixed by now.

STARS ★★★★★

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★★
Handling
★★★★★
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★½☆☆
Overall
★★★★★

The 911 Turbo, with a 383kW 3.8 and PDK, is $366,500; the Turbo S, with 412kW, is $444,900; Turbo and Turbo S cabrios are $396,400 and $466,900 respectively.

This 991 911 is the most fuel-efficient, low-emission, conventionally-powered high-performance car on the market.

As ever, the 3.8 responds the instant you move your right foot, with a speed and crispness that no turbo engine can match.

Above 5000rpm or so, the 3.8 almost feels and sounds like a race engine, and in optional Sport Plus mode ($4790 as part of Sports Chrono, which also includes magnetorheological engine mounts from the GT3, plus launch control on top of the standard Normal and Sport maps), the PDK's shifts are blindingly fast.

You can use all of its performance, too, because they have made this 911 easier to drive quickly than its predecessors.

The reason is balance. It now feels almost like a mid-engine car rather than a rear-engine 911. The longer wheelbase has centred its mass, which now feels to be exactly where you're sitting, so you get the same messages in perfect clarity from each of the car's four corners.

This gives you the confidence to drive it harder, deeper and quicker than previous 911s.

There's no pitching, nose-lifting or back-end squatting either, so it can be launched out of corners harder and with less understeer.

And no car has more rear-end grip than this one. It's almost idiotproof. Almost...

This 911's electric steering is lighter than its predecessors' hydraulic systems, just as precise, and much easier work on a long session in tight bends, where feel and feedback stay completely consistent, no matter how busy you are or how much lock you're using.

Sure, it doesn't have the straight-line sensitivity of the old hydraulic system (in part due to a wider front track as well), but that's not a fault.

You can now relax in the 911, without enduring the wheel's constant fidgeting.

It complements the fact that Porsche has made the 991 911 a much quieter, more enjoyable place to be a on a long journey.

The driver's seat is typically narrow, firm, supportive and comfortable. In cruise mode, the engine is almost silent.

Only the sharpish ride on the 20-inch S wheels and some engine resonance detract from the GT side of the 911 driving experience.

The best 911 yet, without doubt. That said, it has worthy rivals in Audi's R8 and Jaguar's F-Type coupe. Drive all three. Enjoy.



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ A thrill on every drive
- ✔ Sizzling performance
- ✔ More neutral, balanced handling
- ✔ Quieter, more luxurious cabin
- ✔ Great fuel efficiency

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ You can buy one in the USA for less than $85,000. Porsche is gouging us
- ✘ Engine noise reverberation gets tiring after a while
- ✘ 911 resale values aren't as strong as they once were

SPEX (Carrera S PDK)

- Made in Germany
- 3.8-litre flat six petrol/seven-speed automated manual/rear-wheel drive
- 294kW of power at 7400rpm/440Nm of torque at 5600rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway; 12.2L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 205gkm
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 20-inch alloy wheels, PASM adjustable dampers, Bluetooth, navigation, Bose sound, rear parking sensors, bi-xenon headlights, dual zone air, leather trim
- Redbook future values 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Aston Martin Vantage S, Audi R8, Jaguar F-Type, Nissan GTR

PORSCHE **CAYENNE** FROM **$104,700**



The updated 2015 Porsche Cayenne range opens with the 193kW/580Nm 3.0 V6 turbodiesel priced at $104,700.

The 309kW/550Nm 3.6-litre V6 twin turbopetrol Cayenne S is $139,900 and the 382kW/750Nm Cayenne Turbo is $230,800.

The 4.2-litre twin-turbodiesel S, with 283kW (and 850Nm!) is priced at $143,200.

The S E-Hybrid, priced at $139,200, uses a 245kW supercharged 3.0 V6 petrol engine (from Audi) plus a 70kW electric motor and 10.8kWh lithium ion battery to average 3.4L/100km. Combined drivetrain outputs are 306kW and 590Nm.

It's a plug in hybrid, so the battery can be recharged via a 15 amp wall socket and Porsche claims that you can drive for up to 36 kilometres on battery power.

The second generation model, like its VW Touareg twin, gained a bigger body with more interior space, yet shed around 200 kilograms. An eight-speed automatic is standard, while automatic stop/start, regenerative braking and other technologies also help maximise fuel efficiency.

The Cayenne still has more off-road ability than most luxury SUVs, though, with the availability of height-adjustable air suspension, sophisticated traction control systems that can be switched to three off-road modes, plus locking centre and rear differentials as a last resort.

You'll need to spend serious money on a real spare if you're going to hit the dirt (or venture outside a capital city, for that matter), because the standard space saver is completely useless.

The previous naturally-aspirated 3.6-litre V6 petrol range opener has been dropped, so performance won't be an issue in any of the 2015 Cayennes. Even the Hybrid will reach 100km/h in just 5.9 seconds. The 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel has all the performance you could ever need, hitting 100km/h in 7.3 seconds and averaging 6.6-6.8L/100km.

The eight-speed is never less than completely smooth and there's a pair of large, elegant paddles on the wheel if you want to shift gears yourself.

Handling is about as taut and tidy as two tonnes is ever going to get. The non-adjustable suspension on the diesel works nicely on Australian roads.

Normal mode on S models equipped with adjustable dampers also produces an excellent ride/handling compromise, while Sport mode allows for tighter body control when cornering and more precise, responsive turn in.

Handling-wise, it would be a very close run thing between the Cayenne and a BMW X5. The Porsche, particularly the S, is probably just that little bit more agile and balanced, and the Porsche's steering is much more responsive and tactile.

Inside, a Panamera-style centre console initially looks like a "baffle 'em with buttons" gimmick, but actually works.

Porsche's touch-screen system for audio/Bluetooth and other functions is logical and easy to read.

Typically comfortable and supportive seats, outstanding quality and Porsche's usual outrageous options prices complete the Cayenne story.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The 3.0 V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed auto drivetrain is a beauty
- ✔ Great handling and a compliant ride
- ✔ Powerful brakes
- ✔ Comfortable seats
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ You pay a premium for the Porsche badge. The VW Touareg 3.0 V6 turbodiesel is $79,990
- ✘ Space-saver spare tyre

SPEX (Diesel)

- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed sequential automatic/permanent all-wheel drive
- 193kW of power at 4000 rpm/580Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.3 seconds
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- 6.0L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 173kgm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automatic air conditioning, front and rear parking sensors, rain-sensing wipers, roof rails, alarm, satellite navigation, six-stack CD player, air suspension, 19-inch alloys, tinted rear windows, leather, USB input, hard disc storage, bi-xenon headlights, tyre pressure monitoring, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

BMW X5, Mercedes-Benz M-Class, Range Rover Sport, VW Touareg

PORSCHE **CAYMAN** FROM **$106,600**



Whenever Porsche launches a new sports car, in this case the second-generation Cayman coupe, there is inevitably much weeping and wailing about the price.

The Cayman costs $106,600; the Cayman S is $139,400. Are we being gouged? Certainly, but Australia is now one of the most expensive countries in the world. For everything.

Like the original, it's a mid-engine layout based on the Boxster convertible. However, the body, previously all steel, is now 44 per cent aluminium, so it's more than twice as stiff as a Boxster.

Despite the increase in size, plus more equipment and bigger wheels (18s on Cayman; 19s on the S), the Cayman weighs just 1310-1350kg. That's about the same as a Golf.

Engines are as per Boxster — 2.7-litre and 3.4-litre flat sixes — both with slightly higher outputs than in the roadster and an overall fuel efficiency improvement of 15 per cent.

A smooth, precise six-speed manual is standard; tick the $4790 Sports Chrono option and you also get a clever automatic blip function on downshifts.

The manual with Sports Chrono is a tempting alternative to the seven-speed PDK transmission option, which costs $4990.

PDK is the pinnacle of twin-clutch automated manual gearboxes, though, and it's been further improved here, with quicker shifting times and launch control, which flings the S to 100km/h in just 4.7 seconds and the 2.7 to the same speed in 5.4 seconds.

PDK's downshift mapping is also amazingly responsive and rapid in picking the right gear, both when diving into a corner under brakes and when you want to overtake. As the PR blurb says: "A brief and forceful press of the accelerator pedal lets PDK know that a sprint is about to begin." Quite.

You sit deep within the Cayman, with your backside only millimetres from the bitumen, enveloped by the dash and Carrera GT-style high centre console, where the gear lever is perfectly positioned and the go fast buttons for drivetrain and suspension adjustment are right at your fingertips.

Preternatural balance and absolute controllability define the Cayman as one of the world's great cars.

It doesn't have the massive back-end grip of a 911, or that car's howling, monstrous power, but the Cayman is an easier car to drive quickly. As a package where all the important bits — engine, transmission, suspension, steering and brakes — work together, with equal competence, I can think of no other car that combines them so seamlessly.

Electromechanical power steering has lost some feel compared with the previous hydraulic system, but it also filters out those annoying little zits in the road and is wonderfully precise, light and consistent. The ride is surprisingly forgiving now, too.

You need to give the 2.7 a flogging to get it interested. Even allowing for the Cayman's featherweight, 290Nm at 4500rpm is a bit underdone and peaky. The 3.4-litre has 37kW and 90Nm extra, plus a deeper, more luscious note, and is the engine that does proper justice to this brilliant, beautiful car.

So do yourself a favour and spend the extra $32,800 on the S. When you drive it, the price will be the last thing on your mind.

STARS ★★★★★

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★★
Quality and reliability
★★★★½
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★★



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The best sports car in the world
- ✔ Smooth, powerful, fuel-efficient 3.4-litre engine
- ✔ PDK transmission is the best of its type
- ✔ Perfectly balanced handling
- ✔ Reliable and durable

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ No spare
- ✘ 2.7 lacks a bit of grunt
- ✘ Expensive options

SPEX (S PDK)

- Made in Germany
- 3.4-litre six-cylinder petrol/seven-speed PDK/rear-wheel drive
- 239kW of power at 7400rpm/370Nm of torque at 4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.7 seconds
- 6.2L/100km highway; 11.2L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 188gkm
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, leather/alcantara upholstery, bi-xenon headlights, sports seats, USB, navigation
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Audi S5, BMW 435i, Jaguar F-Type

PORSCHE **MACAN** FROM **$84,900**



Porsche's 190kW/580Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel-powered Macan S is $84,900, the 250kW/460Nm 3.0-litre V6 twin-turbo petrol version is $87,200 and the range-topping 294kW/550Nm 3.6-litre twin-turbo Macan Turbo is $122,900.

All three variants are fitted with Porsche's exceptionally slick-shifting seven-speed dual-clutch PDK transmission, permanent all-wheel drive and Off-Road electronic drive modes.

The Macan is more expensive than Audi's Q5 (with which it shares around 30 per cent of its components), BMW's X3 or the Range Rover Evoque. But even a cursory glance at its specifications suggests that Porsche offers segment-leading performance, levels of standard of equipment and (generally pricey) option choices.

Porsche's self-penned "sports car of the (mid-sized) SUV segment" claim is backed up by healthy numbers. For the 0-100km/h sprint, they are 6.3 seconds (diesel S), 5.4 seconds (petrol S) and a scintillating 4.8 seconds (Turbo). The optional Sport Chrono pack, with its launch control and more aggressive drivetrain mapping, shrinks these times by a further 0.2 seconds.

The PDK transmissions perform beautifully and are intuitively mated to any of the available engines, whether you're cruising to the shops or chasing back road enjoyment.

The Turbo certainly feels very quick, but the margin of pace between the all-alloy petrol V6s isn't as wide as one might expect. Both petrol versions are easily capable of antisocial public road velocity with little provocation, and a pace few owners might harness on a regular basis. The surprise sweetie is the diesel. It has 30Nm more torque than the Turbo and is extremely smooth and quiet in operation.

Dynamically, nothing will hang on to the Macan Turbo's tyre tracks when the bitumen begins to twist and turn.

A closer handling match-up would be Macan S against Audi SQ5, cars that share a similar pricepoint and familial DNA. That said, the Macan feels nothing like an Audi and everything like a Porsche.

There are really no dynamic lowlights. The steering — a real Porsche specialty — is inspired. Grip? Incredible in Turbo, robust in either S, though there comes a point, well beyond where most owners will dare, that Macan's hefty mass — 1880-1925kg depending on the variant — overcomes its manic roadholding and superb poise.

Braking? Porsche does some of the best in the biz. And while six-piston monobloc front anchors might seem excessive for a family-moving device, the power of such engineering is duly noticed at a quick clip.

But does it work as an SUV? Ride comfort-wise, absolutely. Macan strikes an impressive ride-handling balance.

Inside, all the key Porsche hallmarks are included: an excellent seating position, the stacked centre console switches, centrally located tachometer, polished alloy and soft-touch surfaces in all the right places, and a neat new steering wheel design aping Porsche's 918 Spyder. There's nothing built-to-price about the touchy-feely experience.

Porsche clearly favoured form — namely the exterior shape and proportions of Macan — over functional boot space, but the boot is still quite useable by its segment's standards.

Macan is not the roomiest SUV out there, but what it lacks in a sense of airiness it compensates for in rich, up-market, sporty ambience. Porsche is gunning for prestige here, not volume-for-your-buck value. Nailed.

STARS ★★★★½

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★½
Handling
★★★★½
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★½



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Proper Porsche vibe
- ✔ Class-leading performance
- ✔ Superb ride-handling balance
- ✔ Wants for little specification
- ✔ Classy interior

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Pricey, but you get what you pay for
- ✘ Slightly claustrophobic cabin
- ✘ Muted engine notes
- ✘ The usual expensive Porsche options

SPEX (S Diesel)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/seven-speed PDK/permanent all-wheel-drive
- 190kW of power at 4000 rpm/580Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 6.3 seconds
- Warranty: Two years/unlimited kilometres
- 6.0L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 173kgm. S petrol figures are 7.3L/100km, 11.3L/100km and 204gkm, on 98 octane premium
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, automatic air conditioning, front and rear parking sensors, reversing camera, rain-sensing wipers, roof rails, alarm, navigation, 19-inch alloys, tinted rear windows, leather, USB input, 40gb hard disc storage, bi-xenon headlights, tyre pressure monitoring, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 46%

compare with...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Range Rover Evoque

RENAULT **CLIO RS200 EDC** FROM **$29,290**



The Renault Clio RS200 EDC (which stands for Efficient Dual Clutch, as in transmission) Sport, tested here, costs $29,290 or $31,790 in Cup specification, which adds a slightly lower, stiffer suspension and 18-inch alloys.

Trophy versions run the same mechanical/chassis hardware and carry a $5500 premium. That buys leather upholstery, heated front seats, a rear camera, dual-zone air and Arkamys audio. A monitor in the Trophy displays a variety of real-time performance data, gathered using GPS as well as in-car telemetry, and can log it as well, which adds to the Clio's appeal as a track day car.

The Renault's 1.6-litre turbopetrol four, which produces a healthy 147kW of power, sounds suitably purposeful. Intake noise is piped into the cabin for extra aural effect.

The 1.6 feels more like a 2.0-litre turbo in its delivery, which features outstanding flexibility from low revs, minimal turbo lag and an extra dose of top-end sting. Normal, Sport and Race modes are available; the latter two increase engine responsiveness, pitch and can also be used with launch control, which will hoik the Renault to 100km/h in a respectable 6.8 seconds.

In Normal and Sport modes, the EDC transmission isn't as intuitive as its VW equivalent in the Polo GTi, but in full manual mode shifts are lightning fast. It's a shame the shift paddles are fixed, though. In a car made for attacking tight corners, it's annoying that with more than 45 degrees of steering lock on you cannot reach the paddles with your fingers to change gear. It's even more annoying when the engine is banging the redline and the very loud warning is telling you to change up.

The steering is also adjustable. Normal is light; Sport and Race are heavier. It's sharp and precise; the thick-rimmed wheel is nicely contoured and has 12 o'clock stitching so you know where the front wheels are pointed.

The Clio darts into a bend as soon as you point it, and it's screwed down tight so there's minimal body roll. An electronic limited-slip diff gets the power down without drama, but the test Sport's 205/45 17 Goodyear tyres squirmed a bit under pressure.

The ride on the base Sport is surprisingly compliant for a hot hatch; expect a more punishing experience in the Cup, though.

Inside, the Clio feels as much like a luxury hatch as a pukka sports piece. The base Sport seat is heavily bolstered, supportive and comfortable; you sit in a tight cockpit, facing a deep dash cowl, with plenty of seat and steering wheel adjustability.

A huge digital speedo dominates the instrument display. The touch-screen infotainment interface features clear, colourful graphics, logical menus and easy-to-hit icons.

There's not a lot of handy storage to be had. The cupholders are short black-sized, while the only covered storage is the small glovebox.

Rear-seat space is average for a small hatch. In other words, it's tight. The boot's big, but there's no spare, just a compressor/goo repair kit.

Ford's Fiesta ST, at $25,990, is the standout buy in this baby hot-hatch class at present. The Clio, though, is a sophisticated, potent and very well-sorted alternative and a much better drive than the Peugeot 208 GTi. Drive VW's Polo GTi as well before you make a decision.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★☆☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Polished and powerful
- ✔ Tractable, willing 1.6
- ✔ Outstanding dynamics
- ✔ Compliant ride in Sport
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Renault's reliability form isn't great
- ✘ Gear shift paddles are fixed
- ✘ Sport needs a rear camera
- ✘ Minimal interior storage
- ✘ No spare
- ✘ No curtain airbags

SPEX

- Made in France
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed dual clutch automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 6000rpm/240Nm of torque at 1750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.7 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 8.1L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 144gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: four airbags, stability control, navigation, Bluetooth with audio streaming, 17-inch alloy wheels, aluminium pedals
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Ford Fiesta ST, Peugeot 208 GTi, VW Polo GTi

RENAULT **CLIO** FROM **$16,790**



Renault is deadly serious about taking on the small-car class leaders such as Kia Rio, Mazda2, Toyota Yaris and Volkswagen Polo with the return of the Clio.

Priced from a competitive $16,790 (plus on-road costs), the five-door Clio hatch arrives with one of the largest and most inviting interiors in its class, and then sinks the boot in with a five-years/unlimited kilometre warranty, capped-price servicing and generous equipment.

The latter includes a very-now tablet-style central touchscreen for the Bluetooth audio and phone connectivity duties, cruise control with a speed limiter function, power windows, air-conditioning, hill-start assist, stability control ... and four airbags.

Why just four when nearly everyone else has six? Cue the car company spin. Renault reckons that smaller-stature rear-seat occupants (let's call them kids) can actually be more prone to trauma during some light-car curtain air-bag deployment scenarios, so it has instead beefed up the surrounding door panels with extra-strong steels to absorb and/or deflect impact forces away.

OK, but we'd still rather have six airbags.

Volkswagen argues a similar case with the (even smaller) Up, and while the Euro NCAP crash-test agency concurs with a full five-star rating for both, the Australian NCAP arm automatically withdraws a star because no curtain air-bags are fitted. In the meantime, Renault, which does take safety seriously, is protesting this anomaly.

Look past the controversy and clear instrument dials, intuitive controls, comfy front seats, big back-seat area, ample ventilation and a practical boot complete what is one of the best small car interiors available.

Powering the base Authentique and $18,290 Expression is a 66kW/135Nm 0.9-litre TCe 90 three-cylinder turbopetrol engine mated to a five-speed manual gearbox. Though tuned for exceptional economy, the tiny powerplant is a far stronger performer than its diminutive dimensions suggest.

As long as the driver is prepared to use the available revs and gears, the TCe 90 offers decent acceleration and a steady stream of torque for spirited and instant responses — and it sounds terrifically eager while doing so.

Auto buyers must step up to the TCe 120 in the $20,290 Expression (the expected best-seller), $23,790 Dynamique or sporty Clio GT, priced at $25,290, all employing an 88kW/190Nm 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol unit driving the front wheels via a six-speed dual-clutch transmission dubbed EDC (Efficient Dual Clutch). A smooth and willing performer, it brings usefully more muscle on the move to make the Clio a rapid little runabout around town and on the open road.

However, the EDC can be tediously hesitant when you stab the throttle for instant take-offs or when edging up an incline at slow speeds. For this reason alone we'd take the TCe 90 manual every time.

Armed with quick steering, a wide stance and Renault Sport-honed MacPherson strut/torsion beam suspension, the Clio rips through tight corners with semi hot-hatch enthusiasm, connecting with both the driver and the road for confident and rewarding handling.

The fact that this feisty little French firecracker tops off everything with a cosseting ride quality highlights just how determined Renault is to win over fresh customers.

If you're looking for a small car that's much more than a mere appliance, put the Clio on your test drive list.

By Byron Mathioudakis

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Beautiful French design
- ✔ Arguably the best drive in the class
- ✔ Roomy, vivacious cabin
- ✔ Eager, efficient drivetrains
- ✔ Sharp handling and supple ride
- ✔ Long warranty and fixed-price servicing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ 95 RON premium required
- ✘ Big price jump to the TCe 120 auto
- ✘ Some dual-clutch box hesitation at take-off speeds
- ✘ No rear air-bag protection
- ✘ French cars can be temperamental
- ✘ Weak resale values

SPEX (Clio TCe 120 EDC)

- Made in Turkey
- 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed dual-clutch EDC/front-wheel drive
- 88kW of power at 4900rpm/190Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.4 seconds
- 4.4L/100km highway; 6.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 120gkm
- Warranty: five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, cruise control with speed limiter, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, 16-inch alloy wheels, navigation
- Redbook future values: 3yr 40%; 5yr: 29%

compare with...

Fiat 500, Ford Fiesta, Kia Rio, Mazda2, VW Polo

RENAULT **MEGANE** FROM **$20,990**



The Renault Megane range opens with the 97kW four-cylinder 1.2-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual Authentique, at $20,990. The six-speed EDC automated manual adds $2000.

The 81kW/240Nm 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/EDC Authentique is $25,990.

GT-Line, with EDC as standard, is $26,990 for the 1.2 petrol; the 1.5 turbodiesel is $30,990.

Wagons include the 1.2/EDC Dynamique at $26,990 and the 1.5-litre turbodiesel/EDC at $29,490.

Both engines go better than their capacity and outputs suggest, though performance is not the Megane's strong point. Fuel efficiency is the number one priority here, though both engines do produce plenty of torque from idle. They will work fine in the city, but if you want to overtake on a country road you'll need a lot of space and time.

Handling is OK and the ride is comfortable and well controlled, even on poor surfaces.

Renault's R Link infotainment system includes voice activation and a large touch screen.

Back-seat legroom is tight. Boot space is average but the extended floor isn't flat and, in the test car, the remote release on the silly plastic "key" didn't work.

A 2.0-litre petrol/CVT drivetrain is available in a folding glass roof Megane convertible, priced from $38,490, and the Fluence sedan, which kicks off at $23,143.

Try a Hyundai i30, Toyota Corolla, Mazda3 or Volkswagen Golf before you buy a Megane. The Renault's high-tech engines are certainly frugal, but as far as performance, value, quality and resale values are concerned, these are better cars.

STARS ★★☆☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★☆☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Comfort and refinement ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★☆☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★☆☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Fuel efficient, low emission engines
- ✔ Long warranty
- ✔ Comfortable ride
- ✔ OK dynamics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Slow
- ✘ Resale values are weak
- ✘ 1.2 requires premium unleaded
- ✘ Tight back-seat space
- ✘ French cars can give you grief

SPEX (1.2 EDC Authentique)
- Made in Spain
- 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 97kW of power at 500rpm/205Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100 in 10.9 seconds (claimed)
- 4.5L/100km highway; 7.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 129gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch steel wheels, USB input, Bluetooth, cruise control.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 28%

compare with...
Hyundai i30, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

RENAULT **KOLEOS** FROM **$27,990**



Renault's Koleos uses Nissan Qashqai body architecture and running gear and Nissan X-Trail drivetrains, clad in a typically stylish Renault suit that is stitched together in a Samsung plant in South Korea.

The front-wheel-drive 2.5-litre petrol/six-speed manual Expression 4x2 is priced at $27,990.

A continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) version is $29,990. The Bose CVT is $35,990.

The all-wheel-drive Bose with the CVT is $39,490 and the Privilege is $45,240.

The 110kW, 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive Bose is $41,490; the Privilege is $47,240.

The diesel used in the six-speed auto Koleos has a low-revving nature that's amplified by tall gearing in the top half of the automatic's ratio set. It's no ball of fire, but performance is fine for daily use. Fuel consumption is quite high for a 2.0 turbodiesel, though.

The Koleos does not like energetic cornering. It's a softly suspended wagon that rolls early and often when you point it into a tight corner.

Forget the heroics and you have secure roadholding on our rough roads, excellent stability and a luxuriously supple ride.

The Koleos does have plenty of parent-friendly features, including side-window blinds, plenty of handy storage, a huge, chilled glovebox and a child-minder mirror.

The driver's seat is narrow with limited travel and legroom.

It's a similar story with the back seat, and the boot's not huge either. The Mazda CX5, Subaru Forester and Outback are more spacious, practical suburban family wagons.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality, reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★☆☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★☆☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Superb ride comfort
- ✔ Easy, flexible turbodiesel performance
- ✔ A full-size spare
- ✔ Secure roadholding

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Rear camera standard only on Privilege
- ✘ Small load area
- ✘ Unsupportive seats
- ✘ Pretty thirsty for a 2.0 turbodiesel

SPEX (2.0 diesel Bose)
- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed auto/all-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 4000rpm/320Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 10.2 seconds
- 7.0L/100km highway; 10.5L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 221gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloys, dual-zone air, Bluetooth, touch-screen navigation, front parking sensors, blind spot warning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...
Mazda CX5, Nissan Dualis, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4

RENAULT **MEGANE RS265** FROM **$43,990**



Volkswagen's Golf GTi is the default choices for most buyers wanting a hot hatch, but there are other enticing alternatives to consider, including the Renault Megane RS265.

When it comes to pure-bred, hot hatchbacks, RenaultSport does them better, meaner and faster than anyone else.

Three models are available. The range opens with the RS265 (265 as in horsepower) Cup, priced at $43,990. The Cup Premium, with Recaro front seats, 19-inch wheels in lieu of the standard 18s and tyre pressure monitoring, is $47,990.

The RS275 Trophy, at $52,990, adds 10 extra neddies, largely thanks to a loud Akrapovic titanium pipe. Leather/Alcantara Recaro seats and beautiful pearl white or liquid yellow paint add to the appeal of the RS275.

A 2.0-litre turbo does the honours, and with 195kW of power (in RS265; RS275 has 205kW) plus 360Nm of torque, the Rs265 is quick, with the 100km/h mark reached in just 6.0 seconds. A six-speed manual is standard.

The 2.0-litre pulls smoothly and strongly from 2000rpm, where it's doing 90km/h in sixth, but the money starts at 3500.

From there it really flies to beyond 6000rpm. Throttle response is adjustable, with the Sport settings also liberating the car's full 195kW and opening up the exhaust for a full-on performance soundtrack.

The six-speed box has a light, precise action, but the clutch is pretty heavy.

The 265 has excellent balance and no body roll. The steering is remarkably sharp and free of torque steer, while the brakes offer superb feel and power when you're driving the Renault hard. And that's exactly what you're supposed to do.

The faster you go, the lighter and more precise the steering becomes, while the top spec Bridgestones are the best antidote to understeer I've ever seen on a front-wheel drive hot-hatch. Under power, the mechanical limited slip diff is also very effective.

A punishing ride means you need to be a committed performance freak to live with this car every day.

The Recaro driver's seat is shaped like a racing shell, much more comfortable, and you could easily do a long journey in it. There's plenty of travel; the deep footwell and long throw clutch might present problems for some. Vision around the car is terrible.

Back-seat space is tight; however, you do get a useful sized boot.

The Renault is an uncompromising car, but if you can live with the ride, every drive will show you why it is also the ace of hot hatchbacks.

The performance Megane range also includes the GT220 hatch and Sport Wagon, with the same 2.0-litre turbopetrol four as the 265 hatch, but tuned for slightly less power: 162kW, plus 340Nm of torque. Automatic engine stop/start is also included.

The 220 hatch is $35,490 and the Sport Wagon is $36,990.

This includes 18-inch gloss black alloys with 225/40 Dunlop Sport Maxx performance tyres and a bespoke suspension tune that's more compliant than the take no prisoners setup in the RS265.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ That body
- ✔ Sizzling, smooth performance
- ✔ Totally planted dynamics
- ✔ All-day driver's seat
- ✔ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Renaults can spit the dummy occasionally
- ✘ Hard ride
- ✘ Tight back seat
- ✘ Weak resale values compared with Golf GTi and Scirocco

SPEX (Cup)
- Made in France
- 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 195kW of power at 5500rpm/360Nm of torque at 3400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.0 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 6.5L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 190gkm.
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, RS data display, 18-inch alloys, cruise control with speed limiter, Bluetooth with audio streaming, dual-zone air, tinted glass, rear parking sensors.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...
Ford Focus ST, Subaru WRX, VW Golf GTi and Scirocco

ŠKODA **YETI** FROM **$23,490**



The Škoda Yeti, like VW's Tiguan, is built on the Golf V platform and uses all VW components.

The 2014 Yeti range opens with the 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel-drive 77 (as in kilowatts) TSi Active, at $23,490. The seven-speed automated-manual DSG transmission version is $25,790.

The 90kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol 90TSi Ambition, with the seven-speed DSG, is $28,290.

The 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive 103TDi Outdoor 4x4 is $35,690; the six-speed DSG version (tested here) is $33,590.

VW's 103kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel has been around for ages and in its current iteration, with direct injection, is still one of the best.

Its defining characteristic is an exceptionally tractable, unstressed torque delivery, which also produces great fuel economy.

Allied with the DSG transmission, it operates at peak efficiency with the transmission management programming, sending it straight to the higher gears with barely a look at second, third or fourth en route.

The fact that it's relatively small, light and fitted with top-quality suspension gives the Yeti a level of handling ability that's at the front of the compact SUV class.

The suspension is firm but compliant, in typical VW style, and on the dirt you can feel the seamless delivery of drive to the rear wheels when you get on the gas to drive out of a corner. All but the biggest potholes are absorbed with no detriment to stability.

Although the Yeti is small, its high roof and large glass area give it a pleasant sense of space. It looks and feels very much like a VW inside, with only the Skoda badging unique to the Yeti. High-quality materials, including nice detail touches such as chrome-look bezels, rubber-backed door handles and rubberised bases in storage bins, are complemented by excellent fit and finish.

A touch-screen audio system, Bluetooth and voice activation are included, plus audio/phone/trip computer controls on the steering wheel and a rear camera.

The driver sits high, however vision is compromised by thick front and side pillars and quite narrow side mirrors.

The driver's seat has a broad, firm, comfortable cushion as well as a supportive, well-bolstered backrest.

The back seat is higher than the fronts, which kids will like because they can see out easily.

The seat is arranged as individual 40/20/40 sections, each adjustable for travel, foldable to extend the load area and, if you wish, easily removable.

The small boot has a couple of thick plastic rails on each side, with movable bag hooks, and a reversible floor mat with plastic on one side. The 40/20/40 arrangement to extend the floor is one of the most versatile around.

If you need to move house, you can just take out all three rear seats and use the Yeti as a van.

The 2014 Skoda Yeti 103TDi 4x4 is one of the best-value practicality/driving packages in the compact SUV class. If you don't want all-wheel drive, the 90TSi is similarly impressive. This engine works beautifully in the Golf VII.

There are a couple of caveats with Skoda. Like other VW Group vehicles, reliability isn't as good as it should be, and the Skoda brand has struggled for traction in Australia, so resale values aren't strong compared with popular rivals such as Mazda's CX5 and Subaru's XV.



STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Unstressed, refined, frugal 2.0 turbodiesel
- ✔ DSG transmission suits it perfectly
- ✔ Excellent handling and ride
- ✔ Kid-friendly (and parent-friendly) back seat
- ✔ Versatile, practical load area

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Not much boot space
- ✘ VW engineering can be temperamental and servicing costs are high
- ✘ Skoda has struggled here, so resale values aren't strong

SPEX (103TDi DSG)

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed DSG transmission/on-demand all-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 4200rpm/350Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 7.8L/100km city. CO_2 emissions are 174gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight (103TDi): 2000kg
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloys, Bluetooth with audio streaming, cruise control, rear camera, navigation, automatic parking, dual-zone air, roof rails
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%

compare with...

Mazda CX5, Subaru XV, VW Tiguan

ŠKODA **OCTAVIA** FROM **$21,690**



Škoda Octavia prices start at $21,690 for the 103TSi sedan (Liftback in Škoda-speak).

Based on the Golf VII's modular platform, the Octavia also runs Golf drivetrains and other mechanicals. All models are available as a sedan or wagon, the latter carrying a $1350 premium.

The 103TSI's 1.4-litre turbopetrol engine is the mainstay of the range, producing a handy 103kW of power and 250Nm of torque. Whether paired to the light six-speed manual or fast but occasionally erratic seven-speed DSG dual-clutch automatic (a $2300 option), this outstandingly smooth and quiet turbo four feels remarkably lively.

The 110TDI DSG models, which start at $35,490, are powered by a refined, tractable 110kW/320Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel which averages just 4.9L/100km.

The $34,690 132TSI DSG Elegance runs a polished, powerful 1.8-litre direct-injection twin-cam turbo, offering 132kW.

Sporty RS models includes the 2.0-litre turbopetrol 162 (as in kW) TSi, from $36,490 and the 2.0-litre turbodiesel 135TDi, from $39,790.

If you have one or two kids, the Skoda Octavia is a value-focused, spacious, safe and practical family car you ought to explore.

Škoda has struggled for traction in the Australian market, though, so resale values are weaker than for equivalent VW Golf models and other rivals such as the Mazda3.

STARS ★★★½☆

Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★½	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Performance ★★★½☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Handling ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★½☆
	Overall ★★★½☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Spacious cabin
- ✔ Super-efficient VW drivetrains
- ✔ Outstanding safety
- ✔ Wagon practicality
- ✔ Confident handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ 95 RON premium unleaded required
- ✘ Jittery ride on big-wheeled non-IRS models
- ✘ VW reliability issues
- ✘ Rear cushion too low for taller passengers
- ✘ No reversing camera
- ✘ Weak resale values

SPEX (103TSI DSG)
- Made in Czech Republic
- 1.4-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual-clutch DSG/front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 5000rpm/250Nm of torque from 1500-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.5s
- 4.6L/100km highway; 6.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 121g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 16-inch steel wheels, full-size spare, Bluetooth, USB, tyre pressure monitoring
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 40%; 5yr 28%

compare with...
Hyundai i40, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, Volkswagen Golf

SUBARU **IMPREZA** FROM **$23,990**



Subaru's Impreza range, available as a hatch or a sedan, opens with the 2.0i six-speed manual at $23,990. A continuously variable transmission (CVT) adds $2000.

The 2.0i-L is $25,300/$27,300 and the 2.0i-S, with the CVT as standard, is $30,990.

All models are powered by a 110kW, 2.0-litre four-cylinder naturally aspirated petrol engine, in which the emphasis is on refinement and economy rather than performance.

Hill climbing and overtaking are both time-consuming processes. This is exacerbated by the CVT, which isn't quite as efficient, responsive or quiet as the CVT in Toyota's Corolla.

The light, solid body, finely calibrated independent suspension, all-wheel drive and 17-inch alloys with quality tyres give the Impreza S sedan, as tested, very secure, confident dynamics on the open road, no matter what the surface. All-wheel drive pays its way in wet, slippery conditions.

Inside, the Impreza S doesn't feel like $30,990 worth.

The driver's seat is flat and unsupportive, there's lots of dull grey plastic, more than a few bits of cheap, shiny stuff, and the large swathes of heavily textured vinyl upholstery around the low-grade leather seat facings are all too obvious. VW's Golf, Mazda3 and the Corolla offer classier cabins.

Easy access to the back seat is complemented by a comfortable cushion and reasonable legroom, though tall front-seat occupants will make it tight.

The sedan has a big boot, but no fold-down rear-seat back. A large temporary spare is under the floor.

The Impreza has been left behind by the new Mazda3 and VW Golf, but its engineering is rock solid. Sure, it ain't the sexiest thing on four wheels, but it's Made in Japan, bulletproof and bankable at trade-in time.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety (ANCAP) ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★½☆☆	Value for money ★★★☆☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Made-in-Japan engineering
- ✔ Secure dynamics and a big-car ride
- ✔ CVT works well with 2.0-litre
- ✔ All-wheel drive shines in wet, slippery conditions
- ✔ Good fuel and emissions numbers on regular unleaded

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ It's pretty slow
- ✘ And it looks pretty stodgy
- ✘ Especially in the cabin
- ✘ No extendable boot
- ✘ Flat, unsupportive driver's seat

SPEX (2.0I-S)
- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6200rpm/196Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0-100km/h in N/A
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 157gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: All models include seven airbags, stability control, Bluetooth, USB connectivity, Data Dot security. 2.0-S adds CVT, 17-inch alloys, alloy pedals, rear camera, dual-zone air, leather trim, tinted rear glass
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 44%

compare with...
Holden Cruze, Honda Civic, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

SUBARU **WRX** FROM **$38,990**



In 1994, Subaru came from the clouds with a unique vehicle: a compact, all-wheel-drive, turbocharged sedan, boasting (for its time) explosive acceleration (0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds) and brilliant, almost idiot-proof dynamics.

At the time, roadtesters everywhere said the Impreza WRX was the performance bargain of a lifetime. Yet in 2015, the fourth-generation WRX, now minus the Impreza family moniker, has landed for $38,990. That's $1000 *less* than the original model of 21 years ago.

Power is supplied by a 2.0-litre, direct-injection turbo four, still horizontally opposed in the Subaru manner, matched with either a six-speed manual gearbox (up from five ratios in the outgoing model), or continuously variable transmission (CVT), featuring an eight-speed manual mode, complete with wheel-mounted shift paddles.

Outputs are up marginally on the 2.5-litre unit it replaces, but thanks in part to an extra 179kg of kerb weight, the new car is seven tenths of a second slower from 0-100km/h (6.0 seconds vs 5.3 seconds for its predecessor).

The 2014 Rex is bigger inside and out, and increased use of high-strength steels is claimed to improve the car's torsional rigidity by 40 per cent, and bending rigidity by 30 per cent. The stiffer platform, with a 25mm longer wheelbase, has led to a suspension recalibration, with stiffer springs, thicker anti-roll bars and firmer bushings.

There's also new LED headlights and daytime running lights, a 4.3-inch colour infotainment screen, and the addition of a driver's knee air-bag brings the total to seven. Subaru has also responded to criticism of the previous Rex's braking performance by fitting larger-diameter and thicker front-brake discs.

Road feel from the quick, electrically assisted steering is great, the stiffer chassis delivers more composure and control in cornering, while the WRX's signature rush of turbo power is there in abundance. Subaru could no doubt dial out this distinctly non-linear power delivery, but it's equally certain Rex buyers love the drama such a torquey burst of acceleration brings.

The AWD system, with active torque vectoring, provides sure-footed drive out of tight corners, and the standard 235/45 17 Dunlop SportMaxx RT rubber grips hard. Firm ride comes with the WRX territory but the dynamic-response versus ride-comfort balance in this car is impressive and biased more towards the former than previously, so there's less understeer.

The WRX has always been a fine handler up to about seven tenths, at which point, when presented with a series of tight corners, it lurched into excessive body roll and deep, severe understeer. The latter is still apparent in the new model, but it occurs at eight tenths now.

The brakes could still use further improvement. On the launch, some fade was evident.

The base $38,990 manual sedan, with the CVT transmission, is a $2000 option. For an extra $5000, Premium variants add auto headlights, electric sunroof, leather, electric driver's seat, push-button start, Sat-Nav, booming 440W, nine-speaker Harman Kardon audio, and rain-sensing wipers.

Despite its imperfections, the Rex remains brilliant value for such an entertaining drive. It's now just $700 more expensive than Ford's 184kW 2.0-litre turbocharged Focus ST. It's also $3000 cheaper than VW's Golf GTi, and $9500 cheaper than the Performance GTi version (which produces 169kW) so when it comes to bang for your bucks, the Rex is still hard to beat.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Tight, solid body
- ✔ Great value for money
- ✔ Big improvement in interior quality
- ✔ Comfortable, supportive sports front seats
- ✔ That wonderful Rex turbo rush

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Clunky manual transmission shift
- ✘ Pronounced turbo lag
- ✘ Brakes still fade under pressure
- ✘ Dour interior decor
- ✘ Slower than previous model

SPEX

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre horizontally opposed four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive
- 197kW of power at 5600rpm/350Nm of torque at 2400-5200rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.0 seconds (claimed)
- 7.1L/100km highway; 12.8L/100km city: 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 213gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, fog lights (front and rear), reverse camera, Bluetooth, automatic air, 4.3-inch colour infotainment display screen, 17-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...

Ford Focus ST, Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, Renault Megane RS265, VW Golf GTI

SUBARU **WRX STI** FROM **$49,990**



Subaru Australia dropped a pricing bombshell with its new fourth-generation WRX STi, launched in 2014, effectively slashing $10,000-$11,000 from the price of the outgoing models. The base variant of the revamped high-performance Rex starts from $49,990, while a Premium variant adding forged 18-inch rims, electric sunroof, heated eight-way electric adjustable front seats, heated wing mirrors, leather trim and wiper de-icer is $54,990.

Even better news for lovers of the turbocharged, all-paw Japanese hero and the rally-bred heritage that moulded it is that the new car hasn t lost any of the potency of the old, while also incrementally raising the overall comfort and quality levels throughout. So while it s arguably the ˝ ttest STi to date, what s undeniable is that it s certainly the best bang-for-your-buck prospect from Fuji Heavy Industries for quite some time.

The powertrain is largely carryover, the 2.5-litre turbocharged boxer ˝ at four retaining 221kW (at 6000rpm) and 407Nm (at 4000), and the trio of rally-bred front/centre/rear differentials key to the STi s handling abilities well beyond the base WRX remain. Added to the new car is Active Torque Vectoring, controlling torque feed to individual wheels and enhancing the sedan-only powerhouse s dynamic talents. The slightly slicker shifting six-speed manual is employed but, unlike the WRX, there s no automatic or dual-clutch transmission option.

New, though, is a stiffer body structure, a quicker steering ratio that promotes a sharper off-centre steering character, a (25mm) longer wheelbase for added stability, and suspension tuning that s ˝ rmer/stiffer throughout. Strangely, though, the STi seems to have a more compliant ride than versions of old, though describing the new car as plush would be a step too far.

On the road, for better or worse, the STi does feel a little old-school, particularly in the context of emerging turbo-four, all-wheel-driven heroes from Germany such as Audi s S3, Merc-Benz s A45 AMG and VW s Golf R, all recently launched or refreshed. The Subaru s hydraulically assisted steering feels a little ponderous in hand, while it takes much rowing through the gearbox to keep the engine which is easily caught snoozing on the boil in the upper rev range. The German cars, which seem to automatically and intuitively man the battle stations on call, are becoming effortlessly quick point to point, corner to corner, while the more mechanical -feeling STi demands more driver interactivity to shine.

That in itself is no bad thing and, on track, shine it does. Keep your driving inputs and weight transfers across the chassis smooth and the STi is incredibly quick, thanks to its keen blend of grip and chassis balance. It dances and shimmies around at its dynamic limits and demands deft skill and precision to return quick lap times. In short, it s a faster car in more skilled driver hands. Which is, some will argue, how a performance car should be.

In many ways it trails behind the Germans, though. The STi feels as quick as, but no quicker than, the Euros. And there s not a lot of signi˝ cant evolution in some areas, particularly materials, quality and execution inside the cabin area.

If freshness and sophistication are your bag, you re best to spend the extra coin and go German. But if you want a bold, loud, barrel of old-school laughs that ll test your driving mettle and bristle the hairs on your neck, there s not much else out there for 50 Large that can match the best STi yet.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★½☆
Comfort and re˝ nement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Spirited dynamics
- ✔ Sharper steering
- ✔ Driver-rewarding character
- ✔ Improved ride comfort
- ✔ Bang-for-your-bucks value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Gearbox needs rowing to keep engine on the boil
- ✘ Hydraulic steering is heavy for normal driving
- ✘ No self-shifting transmission option
- ✘ It s a little thirsty on fuel
- ✘ Interior materials/˝ nish/design dated and low rent

SPEX

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre horizontally opposed turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive
- 221kW of power at 6000rpm/407Nm of torque at 400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.9 seconds (claimed)
- 8.4L/100km highway; 14.0L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 242gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, torque vectoring, rear limited slip diff, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB, dual-zone air, Harman Kardon audio, alarm, sports seats, 18-inch alloys, Data Dot security
- Redbook future values (WRX Premium) 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 42%

compare with...

Audi S3, BMW M135i, Mercedes A45 AMG, Nissan 370Z, VW Golf R

TOYOTA **AURION** FROM **$36,490**



Toyota's 2015 Aurion, like its predecessors (going back as far as the Avalon), is basically a Camry with a V6 engine in it. This in itself is no bad thing as any pre-2000 Camry Vienta V6 owner will tell you.

The Aurion range opens with the AT-X at 36,490. The Touring is $37,990.

The model family then splits, with the luxury/comfort side moving up a grade to the $41,490 Prodigy and Presara at $49,990.

A car based on a Camry with a badge that includes the word "Sport" does seem to be an oxymoron. And here, it is.

However, the marketing mantra says you have to at least pretend, so the second branch of the family is badged "Sportivo", beginning with the SX6 at $40,990. The upspec ZR6 is priced at $47,990.

Sportivo models get firmer suspension (which they don't really need), more cuddly seats, a three-spoke steering wheel with shift paddles, body kit and a few other frills.

There's no problem at all with the way the 200kW 3.5-litre V6 hammers out the power when you press the pedal with intent. It doesn't have much in the way of torque below 3000rpm or so, and the diff ratio is taller on this model, but it's still a V6 so performance is hardly wanting. It's helped by the fact that at 1525-1555kg, the Aurion is also very light for its size.

The 0-100km/h sprint takes 7.2 seconds, comparable with Falcon and a lot quicker than a 3.0-litre V6 Commodore Evoke, yet it will also do serenity mode all day.

The Camry Hybrid, though, is the pick of Toyota's big sedan offerings if you want true luxury car refinement and comfort. The body is lighter, stronger and the suspension has been stiffened on this model, so by big, front-wheel-drive sedan standards the Aurion is a surprisingly tidy handler.

It's not exactly engrossing or *en pointe* agile, but neither is it afflicted by the sloppy steering, lurching body roll and nose-in-the-dirt understeer that often characterises the breed.

The trade-off is a ride that's a bit terse and fidgety, given its "affordable luxury" brief.

The top-spec Presara cabin should say "sitting in here, you're allowed to pretend you're rich" like a Holden Calais, VW Passat, Škoda Superb or Peugeot 508 cabin.

But a forest of fake tree just doesn't work like it did in the 1980s and the Presara's interior, though loaded with gear, is too similar to the industrial-grade base-model AT-X to make a case that you should be paying $13,500 more for it.

That said, there's no issue with the way the Aurion's interior is screwed together and being a Toyota it takes only 30 seconds to master the control layout. The driver's seat is comfortable and supportive, there's acres of space in the back (plus seatbelt warnings for all three seating positions) and in the boot, where you'll also find a full-size spare on an alloy wheel.

The Aurion is better built, more reliable and just as competent on the road as Falcon XT and Commodore Evoke.

They're stretching credibility at $50,000 for the Presara, but at $36,490/$37,990 (less in the real world of advertised drive-away deals) the Aurion AT-X is recommended.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★☆☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★★
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Toyota quality, durability and reliability
- ✔ Base-model AT-X is good value
- ✔ Powerful V6 goes hard when you put your foot down
- ✔ One of the better-handling big, front-wheel-drive sedans
- ✔ Loads of space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Presara doesn't feel like $50K worth
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Doesn't have the lowdown grunt of a Falcon
- ✘ The ride's not quite as comfortable as expected

SPEX (AT-X)

- Made in Australia
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 200kW of power at 6200rpm/336Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.2 seconds
- 7.10L/100km highway; 13.3L/100km city, 91 octane regular, CO^2 emissions are 215gkm
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, USB port, reversing camera, dual-zone automatic air. Presara adds leather, 17-inch alloys, navigation, blind spot monitor, sunroof, rear sunshade, rain-sensing wipers, metallic/mica paint, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr 38%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...

Ford Falcon, Holden Commodore, Honda Accord V6, VW Passat

TOYOTA **KLUGER** FROM **$40,990**



Toyota's 2015 Kluger SUV, a seven-seater-only proposition, kicks off from $40,990 for the front-wheel drive GX. The mid-range GXL is $49,990 and the Grande is $63,520. All-wheel drive adds $4000 to all models.

Weighing in at almost two tonnes (before it's loaded up with the tribe and their gear), the Kluger's 210kW 3.5-litre V6, carried over from the previous model, is more of a revver than a slugger. Therefore, the driver must be prepared to use the accelerator regularly for decent performance. Once on the move, there is sufficient torque to keep things cruising along, helped by the six-speed auto, which usually finds the right gear to make the most of the engine's performance.

However, there is a price to be paid at the pump, with high fuel consumption figures being pretty much unavoidable. At least regular unleaded is recommended, but the lack of a more economical (and torquier) diesel option continues to undermine Kluger's appeal.

The previous Kluger was a sloppy handler — this one's better. It corners confidently, increasing the enjoyment factor while ensuring the occupants are less prone to motion sickness because the body doesn't move or pitch around as much.

Gravel roads in particular show how settled and controlled Toyota's latest SUV is. We're not talking Ford Territory — let alone BMW X5 — levels of handling finesse here, but the Kluger at last now feels well suited to our roads. However, there is a level of firmness to the suspension over bumpier roads in models riding on the larger 19-inch wheels, with some road noise intrusion in the second and rear seating rows. The brakes are adequate.

Kluger's interior is quiet, comfortable, spacious and practical. The driver sits perched high on a supportive multi-adjustable seat, ahead of a modern, pleasant and cleverly conceived fascia with an immediately welcoming ambience. Forward vision is excellent and a rear camera is standard.

Along with big clear instruments, easy-to-use controls and superbly effective ventilation, there is a tray across the dashboard for items like mobile phones to be placed upon (and recharged), while a 24.5-litre bin between the front seats is large enough to double up as a laundry basket. Almost.

The second-row's cushion is low set and a tad flat for some posteriors, but the split/fold bench is roomy enough for a trio of adults (at a pinch). It slides and tips forward with just one tug of a lever from both sides of the car for easy third-row entry and egress, via a wide aperture.

The third row is really for kids only, though for short journeys most adults should experience little difficulty.

Most seven-seaters have notoriously tiny boot areas with all chairs up in situ, and the Kluger is no different really. A 12-volt outlet is fitted in the load bay. Drop the third row flat and there is a big 529 litres of luggage volume available, or 1171 litres of flat-load vastness with the middle row folded as well. A full-size alloy spare is standard.

The Grande has a power-operated tailgate with a pop-up hatch glass for handy small-item access.

By Byron Mathioudakis

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Spacious, practical interior
- ✔ Secure handling
- ✔ Smooth V6 drivetrain
- ✔ Standard seven-seat configuration
- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ Toyota reliability and resale value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ High fuel consumption
- ✘ Firm ride on large wheel/tyre package
- ✘ Some cheap-looking cabin trim
- ✘ Second-row cushion low and flat
- ✘ Antiquated and annoying foot-operated park brake

SPEX (GXL 2WD)

- Made in the USA
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/six-speed automatic/front- or all-wheel drive
- 210kW of power at 6200rpm/337Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 8.0L/100km highway; 14.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO^2 emissions are 240gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: seven airbags, stability control, camera, rear parking sensors, 18-inch alloys, Bluetooth, USB socket; GXL adds three-zone air, leather, heated front seats and roof rails; Grande includes radar cruise, lane-departure and blind-spot warning, sunroof, power tailgate, navigation, digital radio and rear side-window sunshades
- Redbook future values: 3yr 59%; 5yr: 45%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Honda Odyssey, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Holden Captiva 7, Nissan Pathfinder

VOLKSWAGEN **POLO** FROM **$16,290**



Volkswagen's Polo delivers big car quality, safety, refinement and comfort, plus highly advanced drivetrain technology at a reasonable price. The 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol 66TSi (66 as in kilowatts of power) Trendline with a five-speed manual costs $16,290, or $18,790 with an optional seven-speed automated manual DSG transmission.

The 81TSi Comfortline uses the same 1.2-litre engine in a higher state of tune, matched with a six-speed manual, which costs $18,290, or $20,790 with a seven-speed DSG.

The 1.2's performance is comparable with a sporty, naturally-aspirated 1.6-litre engine, but its fuel efficiency and CO^2 emissions are up to 30 per cent lower.

The Golf convinced us that you can get excellent performance from just 1.4 litres. The 1.2 is equally impressive and is able to shift the Polo with purpose.

It really goes from about 2500rpm, with amazing refinement for a small petrol engine and solid punch through to 5000rpm or so, at which point it's a bit less willing as it heads for the 6300rpm redline.

The Polo is agile in corners, has a very confident, secure feel and excellent stability on rough roads, where it sits on the bitumen with the confidence of a larger car.

The ride is also much more absorbent and quieter than most small cars.

The brakes lack power, especially at highway speeds, and pedal feel is wooden, too.

A sports option pack, at $1500, adds 17-inch alloys and lowered suspension.

The sharp, stylish exterior look is complemented by a formal, functional dash layout with outstanding fit, finish and material quality.

The cabin has been given a Golf VII-style makeover for 2015, which includes a new steering wheel, touch screen infotainment system with Bluetooth and audio streaming plus a USB socket.

The driver's seat has a long cushion that is surprisingly unsupportive, though the back rest provides good upper body support.

Tall drivers will use most of the long-seat travel, but unlike many small cars, if you're 180cm or taller you can get comfortable.

Nice touches include all windows up or down when you hold the lock or unlock button on the remote, cruise control and hooks on the centre pillars. Safety is a VW strength and the Polo now offers a $1500 safety option package with the lastest driver assistance technologies, including radar adaptive cruise control and automatic emergency braking.

A reversing camera, however, is still not standard. It's included in the safety option pack.

The price of comfortably accommodating tall front-seat occupants is a tight rear seat. Four average-sized adults can live with each other in the Polo, though, and it's fine for kids.

There's reasonable boot space and the floor can easily be extended.

There's a false floor, under which you can keep items out of sight in a large well, or you can lower the false floor and have one big, deep space. A full-size spare is standard.

The Polo's main rivals are the Honda Jazz, Mazda2 and the Kia Rio. All three offer superior reliability as a key point of difference with the VW. The Kia backs this up with a market leading seven year/unlimited kilometres warranty coverage.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Safe and solid
- ✔ Excellent performance and economy
- ✔ Comfortable ride
- ✔ Big, versatile boot
- ✔ Good legroom and adjustability for tall drivers

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Wooden brakes
- ✘ Small side mirrors
- ✘ No reversing camera as standard
- ✘ VWs can be temperamental

SPEX (81TSi DSG)
- Made in South Africa
- 1.2-litre turbocharged four-cylinder/seven-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 81kW of power from 4500-5600rpm/175Nm of torque from 1400-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.3 seconds (claimed)
- 4.2L/100km highway; 5.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 112gkm
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard (Comfortline): Six airbags, stability control, Bluetooth with audio streaming, steering wheel controls, cruise control, chilled glovebox, automatic air, heated exterior mirrors and 15-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 35%

compare with...
Honda Jazz, Kia Rio, Mazda2

VOLKSWAGEN **GOLF** FROM **$21,490**



CARS OF THE YEAR WINNER

Volkswagen's seventh-generation Golf starts at $21,490 for the 90kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual 90TSi; with a seven-speed automated manual DSG transmission, it's $23,990.

The same drivetrains are also available in Comfortline specification, priced at $24,990 and $27,490 respectively.

The 1.4-litre engine's power increases to 103kW (and torque also goes up from 200Nm to 250Nm) in the 103TSi Highline, which also has the seven-speed transmission and extra equipment as standard. It's $31,990.

The 110kW (and 320Nm) 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed DSG Highline is $34,490.

There's no significant advantage gained in choosing the more expensive and powerful 103TSi petrol model over the 90TSi. Both are exceptionally smooth and the 90 has solid, usable punch where you need it, across the midrange. So does the diesel, of course, with the added benefit of outstanding — as in 4.9L/100km — fuel efficiency.

The DSG transmission is smooth and responsive, especially in the 90TSi, though a hesitation from rest persists. Both petrol engines are also fuel misers, on 95 octane premium.

The base 90TSi has everything you need except a camera, which is a cynical omission. Comfortline is the value sweet spot, with parking sensors, camera, 16-inch alloys, more supportive seats, extra storage and a classier dash. Top of the range Highline adds sports seats, navigation and 17-inch alloys, which make the ride a touch lumpy and noisy.

The Golf handles with an almost sporty feel in the way it points accurately into corners, stays relatively flat and grips with authority, assisted by its electronic front differential, inherited from the previous Golf GTi.

The electric steering is precise, light and communicative when you're actually turning the wheel, but it's a touch vague and wandery in the straight ahead position at freeway speeds.

Powerful, progressive brakes add to safety and driving enjoyment. If you do have a crash, say a sideswipe on a bend, the brakes are automatically applied to stop the car as quickly as possible, minimising the risk of a secondary collision.

Inside, the Golf features tactile materials with durable finishes, a simple, timeless dash design with an intuitive touchscreen and a spacious, comfortable, natural driving position with properly supportive seats. Interior noise levels are low.

A bargain $1300 driver-assistance package on Comfortline and Highline includes radar cruise, automatic hands-free parking and automatic emergency braking to save you from a low-speed rear-ender.

Back-seat space is sufficient for most adults, and the seat is firm, comfortable and supportive. It's quite narrow, though, compared with a Corolla or Mazda3.

Boot space is reasonable; the floor is also low, with a small lip, so it's easy to load.

If you want more cargo room, the Golf wagon, with DSG as standard, starts at $25,540 for the 90TSi. Comfortline spec is $29,290, 103TSi Highline is $33,840 and 110TDi Highline is $36,340.

The only notable caveat on the Golf is VW's continuing and acknowledged struggle to deliver consistent reliability. VWs tend to have more problems than their Japanese and Korean competitors and continue to perform poorly in owner satisfaction surveys, notably the benchmark JD Power quality and reliability surveys in the US. This Golf may deliver a better experience for owners. That remains to be seen.

However, there's no other class in which one car — this one — is so superior in most respects to its rivals, including the next best car in this contest, the Mazda3. Drive the Golf and you'll be sold.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★★
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★½
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The real German car deal at a bargain price
- ✔ Refined, punchy, frugal engines
- ✔ Comfortline means what it says
- ✔ Premium price safety engineering
- ✔ Much-improved handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Camera should be standard
- ✘ Narrow back seat
- ✘ VW reliability can be iffy
- ✘ Space-saver spare
- ✘ Touch-screen graphics are slightly pixellated

SPEX (90TSi DSG)

- Made in Germany
- 1.4-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 90kW of power at 5000-6000rpm/200Nm of torque from 1400-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.3 seconds (claimed)
- 4.7L/100km highway; 6.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 126gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, fatigue detection, 16-inch alloy wheels, touch-screen audio with Bluetooth, USB, automatic headlights and wipers, camera, front and rear parking sensors, dual zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 43%

compare with...

Ford Focus, Holden Cruze, Mazda3, Peugeot 308, Toyota Corolla



More brand new cars than anywhere else

carsales.com.au
Australia's No.1 because it works!

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI FROM $41,990



Volkswagen's Golf GTi, like the rest of the Golf VII range, doesn't mess around with a winning formula even though the car is virtually all-new.

The GTi costs $41,490 with a six-speed manual, or $44,490 with a six-speed dual-clutch automated manual DSG transmission, as tested.

In standard trim, its 2.0-litre turbocharged four produces 162kW of power; the Performance variant, priced at $48,490, ups this to 169kW. It also scores 19-inch alloys (18s are standard), larger brakes, a more responsive electronic front differential lock, bi-xenon headlights, and more heavily-bolstered front seats.

Like its predecessors, GTi VII isn't a hard-case hot hatch. This version has moved closer to luxury territory with features such as adjustable dampers, which even have a Comfort mode, and a more refined, sophisticated character overall.

The 2.0-litre four now produces 350Nm of torque — 70Nm more than previously. This translates to a fat, smooth, responsive midrange that then segues into a pleasantly rorty top end. Whatever gear you're in, apart from the tall sixth, there's plenty of turbo torque available.

Fuel efficiency is also outstanding. On a full day's testing, with all sorts of driving in the mix, the test car averaged 8.1L/100km, albeit on the recommended 98 octane.

The six-speed DSG didn't put a foot wrong either. Some of the downshifts seemed a touch slow compared with others tried, but the characteristic hesitancy and most of the jerkiness in traffic was not evident here. VW has deservedly copped a bollocking over DSG's performance and reliability, so maybe it's finally doing something about it.

You can set up the GTi as you like it by adjusting the engine, transmission, electric steering and dampers using the touch-screen menu, to Comfort, Normal, Sport, Eco or Individual settings. They mean what they say, too, with noticeable differences between each one. Sport, as you would expect, is the most fun, but even here the ride is absorbent. The Sport steering setting, though, is overweighted; I preferred to leave the wheel set to Normal.

Assisted by fine body control, good balance, powerful (though wooden at low speeds) brakes, the just-a-little-bit-of-slip electronic diff lock and lots of grip from the 225/40 Bridgestone Potenzas, the GTi will dispose of a set of corners with grace and precision. That said, it's not the most involving drive on the block. Like quite a few cars with layers of electronics controlling their dynamics (hello BMW...), the GTi is lacking in feedback until you're punting it at a pretty hectic pace. As an owner, though, you would with time pick up nuances and behaviours that aren't necessarily evident on a short roadtest. The GTi is one of those cars that takes a while to get to know.

Inside, you sit in a well-padded and bolstered GT-style sports seat that's a bit squeezy on the upper thighs. Familiar Golf GTi cues include dark decor, with black rooflining, the beautiful flat bottom, lightweight wheel, red stitching and lighting and de rigeur fake carbon-fibre trim. Tartan upholstery, of course, is standard.

As a practical, stylish, comfortable everyday performance drive that's loaded with equipment, the Golf GTi is a winner. As usual.

For comments on the Golf R, see the Audi S3 test on page 19.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★★☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ Does everything well
- ✔ Refined, safe and practical
- ✔ Smooth, torquey 2.0 turbo
- ✔ Agile, secure dynamics
- ✔ Comfortable ride
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ VW's ongoing quality and reliability issues
- ✘ Not the most communicative, tactile drive
- ✘ Requires 98 octane

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed DSG/front wheel drive
- 162kW of power from 4500-6200rpm
- 350Nm of torque from 1500-4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 8.3L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 153gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, adaptive, adjustable dampers, sports seats, navigation, Bluetooth with audio streaming and voice, two SD card slots, USB (but not iPod connective), rear camera, front and rear parking sensors, leather wrapped wheel and gear lever.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Ford Focus ST, Mercedes A250 Sport, Renault RS265, Volvo V40 T5

VW **GOLF CABRIO** FROM **$40,390**



VW's Golf Cabriolet, which starts at $40,390, now covers the affordable convertible market for VW, with the folding metal roof EOS having been dropped from the range for 2015.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
Not yet tested	★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★½	★★★★☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★½☆	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★½☆	★★★★☆

Given the considerable extra engineering work that goes into a convertible, and the open-top driving pleasure it offers, the Golf Cabrio is a good deal. It stands up against $50,000+ rivals such as BMW's 2 Series and Audi's A3.

The 1.4-litre engine provides smooth, strong and exceptionally frugal performance. You can also have it with the seven-speed automated manual DSG transmission for an extra $2500.

The body is extremely rigid, the suspension is tuned on the firm side to cope with the extra mass of the convertible's structure, and the car rides on 17-inch alloys with big 225/45 tyres, so handling is confident and secure and the ride is comfortable.

Up front, it's a Mk VI Golf with the usual design elements and features. There's not a huge amount of space in the back, but four average-sized adults can live with each other on a shorter journey.

The folding fabric roof is a much simpler, more reliable and lighter assembly that the Eos convertible's folding metal roof. It opens in just nine seconds and you can open it at speeds up to 30km/h. It generates a bit more wind noise when raised, but it's not excessive. It also leaves you with a large, useful boot when lowered, another advantage over the Eos.

The Golf Cabrio is the standout bargain in today's convertible market. Highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ The best-value convertible on the market
- ✔ Simple, fast-folding fabric roof
- ✔ Punchy, economical engine
- ✔ Tidy handling and a compliant ride
- ✔ Usable boot space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Quality and reliability aren't VW brand strengths. This engine and the DSG transmission can play up.
- ✘ Not much else, really

SPEX (DSG)
- Made in Germany
- 1.4-litre turbocharged and supercharged petrol/six-speed manual/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 118kW of power at 5800rpm/240Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.4 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 153gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Five airbags, stability control, pop-up rear rollover protection bars, 17-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone air, single CD player, Bluetooth with audio streaming, USB connectivity
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Audi A3, BMW 2 Series, Mini Cooper

VOLKSWAGEN **SCIROCCO R** FROM **$47,990**



Volkswagen's Scirocco hatch is basically an extreme version of the superseded MkVI Golf GTi. Like the GTi, it's a front-wheel-drive layout, but instead of the GTi's 155kW 2.0-litre turbocharged engine it uses the MkVI all-wheel-drive Golf R's 188kW version.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety	Quality and reliability
★★★★★	★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide	Comfort and refinement
★★★★½	★★★½☆
Performance	Value for money
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Handling	**Overall**
★★★★☆	★★★★☆

The six-speed manual R, tested here, is $47,990; the six-speed DSG automated manual is $50,490.

Servicing costs are now capped on VWs, but its patchy reliability record can still jump up and bite you when the warranty runs out.

The 2.0-litre is tuned for power here, but with 330Nm of torque available from 2500rpm it pulls OK off idle; above 3000rpm or so it flies, with no dips or pauses, immediate and crisp response to the pedal and a lovely sound, through to 7000rpm.

The six-speed manual has a tactile, precise action, while the clutch is light and progressive.

Although it's built on a MkVI Golf platform, the Scirocco feels noticeably closer to the road, with a lower centre of gravity, firmer suspension and superior cornering ability. It's an easy car in which to attack a set of tight bends, turns in with great willingness and actually feels lighter than it is.

Body control and comfort are excellent, and you can dial up the compromise that suits you using the adaptive dampers.

Up front you're in a steeply angled, heavily bolstered, body-hugging sports seat, with plenty of travel. Rear vision should be terrible, but it's not too bad.

A 2015 Scirocco R update was due to arrive in showrooms as we went to press.

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Much sexier to look at than a Golf
- ✔ 188kW 2.0 turbo has almost zero lag and goes like the clappers
- ✔ Light, precise six-speed manual
- ✔ One of the best-handling hatchbacks around
- ✔ Classy, comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ High servicing costs
- ✘ VW's quality and reliability record is not good. Sell before the warranty expires
- ✘ No spare
- ✘ Needs 98 octane fuel

SPEX
- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 188kW of power at 6000rpm/330Nm of torque from 2500-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 189gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, bi-xenon headlights, alarm, rear parking sensors, dual-zone automatic air, tyre pressure monitoring, six-stack CD, SD card slot, Bluetooth with audio streaming
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%: 5yr: 40%

compare with...
Ford Focus ST, Renault Megane RS265, Subaru Impreza WRX

VOLKSWAGEN **JETTA** FROM **$24,990**



Volkswagen has always been pretty defensive about the "Golf with a boot" tag that's stuck to its Jetta sedan and the Bora before it.

Until now, that's exactly what both cars have been. The current Jetta, though still comprised of Mk VI Golf mechanicals, now has a bespoke body which makes it look more like a Passat.

It's also moved closer to the Passat in its dimensions, particularly rear-seat space, which is now much more generous than in the previous Golf derivatives and makes the Jetta a viable family car.

It's also great value. Prices start at $24,990 for the (118kW) 118TSi, which runs a 1.4-litre turbocharged and supercharged petrol four.

It offers outstanding refinement, usable torque, performance and fuel efficiency. However it can also be temperamental, and was dropped for the MkVII Golf.

Matched with the seven-speed twin-clutch transmission — DSG in VW speak — it's $27,490.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★½
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

Comfortline specification, tested here, adds plenty of useful gear, including a visual and audible parking sensor system at both ends, dual-zone air, 16-inch alloys, "Comfort" front seats (which aren't particularly comfortable) and a low tyre pressure indicator. It's priced at $29,240. The Highline is $33,290.

The 103kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel/six-speed DSG 103TDi Comfortline is $35,790.

The 118TSi, though, is the pick of the range. If you think 1.4 litres is too small to be serious, give it a try and you'll be amazed. Even around town you'll easily do better than 10 litres per 100 kilometres.

The seven-speed transmission gets its shift speed, timing and refinement spot on 95 per cent of the time. However there can be a moment's delay when you push the accelerator to move off from rest, then a quite sudden engagement.

Sport mode is more energetic, or you can shift gears yourself using the lever.

There are downsides to owning such a high-tech drivetrain. VWs are very expensive to service comparable with luxury German brands, and their reliability record is not inspiring.

Anecdotal evidence suggests you should trade in before the warranty expires.

Four tall adults can travel comfortably in the Jetta and the boot is enormous.

The rear seat is only a couple of centimetres narrower than a Toyota Camry's, so three kids can travel safely.

Our test car had the $2000 Sport option, which includes 17-inch alloys and stiffer suspension.

The Jetta handles OK without it and a standard electronic differential lock is useful, but the Sport option certainly does reduce body roll and improve steering responsiveness.

The electromechanical power steering is accurate, if lacking somewhat in feedback.

The price you pay for sharper dynamics is a compromised, slightly choppy ride on rough roads at low speed. In standard form, ride comfort is best in class.

If you want a family-sized interior in a relatively compact overall package, the Jetta is worth a drive. It's got all of the attributes that made the Golf VI one of the most awarded cars in history (and the faults that gave some owners grief), plus a generous amount of extra space in the back seat and the boot.

Škoda's Octavia is a newer Golf VII based model, at similar prices, while the Mazda6 is the clear class leader.



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Value for money
- ✔ 118TSi engine performance and economy
- ✔ Generous back seat and boot space
- ✔ Tidy dynamics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Reliability isn't great
- ✘ Runs on premium unleaded
- ✘ Temporary spare

SPEX (118TSi Comfortline)

- Made in Mexico
- 1.4-litre turbo and supercharged petrol/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 118kW of power at 5800rpm/240Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.3 seconds (claimed)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium, CO^2 emissions are 144gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, dual-zone air, 16-inch alloys, Bluetooth with audio streaming, chilled glove box, front and rear parking sensors, rain-sensing wipers
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 33%

compare with...

Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Peugeot 508, Škoda Octavia

VOLKSWAGEN **PASSAT** FROM **$38,990**



The Passat range starts at $38,990 for the front-wheel-drive 118kW 1.8-litre turbopetrol 118TSi sedan, with a seven-speed automated manual DSG transmission. The 130kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel 130TDi Highline sedan, with a six-speed DSG, costs $44,490.

The 220kW 3.6-litre direct-injection V6/six-speed DSG/all-wheel-drive V6 4MOTION FSi Highline sedan costs $57,240.

Wagon variants add $2000.

The four-cylinder Passat engines are exceptionally fuel efficient and provide adequate performance for what is a fairly large, heavy car.

The 1.8 won't break any speed records but it's refined, very frugal by petrol standards (averaging 7.2L/100km in the sedan) and the seven-speed DSG makes the most of its performance.

The pick of the engines is the 2.0-litre turbodiesel. The price is certainly right and its 380Nm worth of torque is 30Nm more than the 3.6-litre V6 petrol engine, but it achieves the result using about 40 per cent less fuel.

The 130TDi also has an automatic stop/start system as part of its BlueMotion fuel saving technology.

Electromechanical steering is fitted across the range, again to save fuel and reduce emissions.

The 3.6-litre V6 is a nice device with a responsive, muscular delivery that characterises high-powered naturally-aspirated engines.

In that car, it cracked the 0-100km/h trip in 6.9 seconds

As noted in other tests, the DSG transmission can sometimes be harsh, erratic in traffic and slow to engage compared with a normal auto when you put your foot down to move off from rest.

The front-wheel-drive Passat is a benign handler, as VWs always are, and the ride is comfortable and compliant.

The wagon handles as competently as the sedan.

The Passat's interior displays VW's typically formal, functional styling and layout.

Generous sprinklings of chrome indicate upmarket aspirations.

Noise, vibration and harshness levels are low.

The options list includes adaptive cruise control with automatic full-stop braking at low speeds, plus a lane-keeping system similar to the one used by Mercedes-Benz, which employs a camera to watch the road ahead at speeds above 65km/h.

If you drift across the lane markings, it will gently steer you back into your lane.

The back seat is properly shaped, firmly padded, spacious and comfortable for two adults.

The wagon has three child-restraint anchors on the back of the seat.

Seatbelt indicators are provided and two integrated child booster seats are optional.

The sedan's large boot has a 60/40 split rear seat back and porthole, both lockable.

The wagon's spacious, practical cargo area includes a load cover/protective mesh barrier and a fully flat floor, easily extendable to 1.8 metres. A power tailgate is standard.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★½☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



The CC is a Passat with a sexier body, more fruit and higher prices: $55,490 for the 125TDi and $65,490 for the V6 FSi.

VW also offers a faux SUV version of the wagon, the Alltrack.

It gets higher ground clearance, a 125kW 2.0 turbodiesel/4MOTION drivetrain, and is priced at $48,290.

An all-new Passat is due by the end of the year.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Sharp pricing
- ✔ Well equipped
- ✔ Powerful V6; torquey, frugal 2.0 turbodiesel
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Comfortable, spacious cabin
- ✔ Lots of premium gadgets available on the options list

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ DSG isn't as smooth as a normal automatic
- ✘ VW quality and reliability are inconsistent
- ✘ V6 is pretty thirsty

SPEX (130TDi sedan)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 130kW of power at 4200rpm/380Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 8.4 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- 5.0L/100km highway; 6.6L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 147gkm
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, dual-zone automatic air, 17-inch alloys, parking sensors at both ends, rain-sensing wipers, tyre pressure sensors, rear camera, navigation
- The 3.6 V6 4Motion adds leather upholstery, heated front seats, 18-inch alloys, alarm and foglights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 30%

compare with...

Hyundai i40, Mazda6, Nissan Altima Peugeot 508, Subaru Liberty

Tailored vehicle valuations online

RedBook.com.au
THE PRICING AUTHORITY

VOLKSWAGEN **TIGUAN** FROM **$28,490**



The base Tiguan is the front-wheel-drive 1.4-litre turbocharged and supercharged petrol/six-speed manual 118 (as in kilowatts of power) TSi, at $28,490. It's $31,490 with a six-speed automated manual DSG transmission.

All-wheel-drive models include the 2.0-litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel 130TDi, which costs $39,990 with a seven-speed DSG.

There are also two 2.0-litre direct-injection turbocharged petrol models.

The 132TSi is available with the seven-speed DSG, at $36,990.

The more powerful 155TSi, with the same engine used in the MkVI Golf GTi and the seven-speed DSG, is $44,990.

The 1.4-litre 118TSi and 2.0-litre turbodiesel engines both work well in the Tiguan, and if you're happy with a front-wheel-drive layout, the 118TSi is perticularly good value.

When you're loaded up with the kids and their junk, the turbodiesel will tick along at low revs in completely unstressed fashion, and when you need strong performance its mid-range torque is ample for most situations.

The 155kW engine is punchy, exceptionally smooth and tractable around town as well. It drives the Tiguan to 100km/h in just 7.3 seconds, so not too many other compact SUVs will see which way it went.

The seven-speed DSG in the test car also worked more harmoniously with the engine than some examples tested previously.

You have to get used to a moment's hesitation when moving away from rest, though, and it can be an infuriating thing when you're trying to negotiate a tight parking manoeuvre. DSGs can also be temperamental.

The Tiguan's suspension is taut and well controlled. It's a touch top heavy in tight corners, but overall handling ability is up at the front of the class.

The ride is firm but absorbent and comfortable, even on the 155TSi with sports suspension and larger wheels.

The Tiguan's party trick is no-hands parallel and 90-degree parking, called Park Assist.

Drive slowly past a space and the system will tell you if it's big enough to fit into.

You then pull up, push a button, and the VW will steer itself back into the space while you control its speed using only the pedals.

It really works. Most of the time.

The VW's back seat has three lap/sash belts but is really only wide enough for two. Legroom with the seat pushed fully back (it has 15cm of travel) is good, though.

The small load area has extra storage under the removable floor plus a temporary spare. The load area is easily extended in a 60/40 split to yield a flat floor of 1.65 metres without compromising front-seat travel; the fold-flat front passenger seat option allows objects up to 2.5 metres to be carried.

A-grade options in the compact SUV class include the Tiguan, its Škoda Yeti twin under the skin, Mitsubishi's ASX, Subaru's XV and the slightly larger Kia Sportage and Mazda CX5.

The petrol-powered Tiguans are better drives than their rivals, especially at base-model level where the 118TSi is a standout.

In turbodiesel territory, though, it's a much closer contest, with the Sportage, CX5, Yeti and Tiguan all having excellent engines. Mazda's outstanding CX5 is the class leader.

An updated 2015 Tiguan was due as this issue went to press.

STARS ★★★½☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★½☆
Overall
★★★½☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Punchy, frugal petrol and turbodiesel engines
- ✔ Comfortable seating
- ✔ Excellent dynamics and comfortable ride
- ✔ Reasonably priced
- ✔ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Reliability dramas are a possibility
- ✘ Petrol engines use premium fuel
- ✘ Small load area
- ✘ Temporary spare

SPEX (130TDi DSG)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 130kW of power at 4200rpm/380Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.8L/100km highway; 7.0L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 164gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automatic air, rear camera, rear parking sensors, active front-seat head restraints, USB port, Bluetooth, 17-inch alloy wheels, roof rails
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

compare with...

Hyundai ix35, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX5, Škoda Yeti, Subaru XV

VOLKSWAGEN **TOUAREG** FROM **$63,990**



The VW Touareg is the same SUV as the Porsche Cayenne. It's assembled with millimetre-perfect German precision ... in Slovakia.

Like the latest Cayenne, the second-generation Touareg is lighter, stronger and gets a big lift in fuel efficiency.

The range opens with the $63,990 150TDi. That signifies the 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel's power output, an irrelevance in 2.2-tonne SUV territory.

It also produces 400Nm of torque, which is what really counts when this much weight is involved.

The $80,790 V6 TDi runs the same engine, remapped and returboed for 180kW and a stomping 550Nm. This version, which is also used in the Cayenne, can move continents.

Is it worth an extra $16,800? Probably not, unless you're going to drag 3.5 tonnes around (the Touareg's maximum towing weight), in which case you want every Newton metre you can get.

That said, Volkswagen's less-than-impeccable quality and reliability record doesn't lend itself to placing 3.5 tonnes worth of strain on the Touareg. Neither does the fact that it's a unitary construction body.

The 150TDi is comparatively lazy off the line, yet tractable and punchy. The eight-speed automatic plus automatic start/stop makes it work with unbeatable efficiency.

However, both Touareg turbodiesels I drove generated excessive drivetrain noise, a high-pitched whine that was quite intrusive.

If you're keen to go bush, you'll need $85,790 for the 4XMotion with extreme country kit, including low-range gearing. However, there's no provision for a full-size spare, which does seem to make the whole off-road idea not very appealing.

It's even less so in the $114,990 V8 TDi.

This variant runs a 4.2-litre V8 turbodiesel, with 250kW and 800Nm, as also used in Audi's Q7.

The standard suspension on the 150TDi doesn't control body movement properly, so the VW leans excessively in corners and gets wobbly and nervous if they're also littered with potholes.

In these conditions, the suspension also transmits a lot of road shock and noise to the cabin.

Adaptive, adjustable air suspension is standard on other models, and it delivers a marked improvement in handling.

The Touareg is unarguably a safe, practical family freighter, though, with acres of space for the kids and their gear, nine airbags, niceties like leather and a classy, rich feel to the cabin, even in the base model.

VW upped the standard specification for 2013, with the 150TDi now equipped as standard with a rear camera, with static and moving guidance lines, bi-xenon headlights, front seats with adjustable backrest side bolsters and greater adjustment for the front-seat head restraints.

VW's driver-fatigue-detection system, which monitors steering behaviour and other indicators that you might be about to nod off, is also standard.

The Touareg 150TDi offers a lot of SUV for the money, and it is unarguably great value, but only if you're compelled to own a European badge.

If you're not, test drive the Ford Territory diesel, Kia Sorento and the class-leading Jeep Grand Cherokee before you sign up.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
Not yet tested
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★☆☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★½☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ 150TDi is well priced
- ✔ 3.0 V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed auto is as fuel efficient as they come
- ✔ Strong resale values
- ✔ Well-organised, easy-to-use dash layout
- ✔ Excellent interior fit and finish

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ VWs can have reliability issues
- ✘ Mediocre dynamics in base 150TDi
- ✘ Drivetrain whine

SPEX (150TDi)

- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 150kW of power at 4000rpm/400Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.0 seconds (claimed)
- 6.5L/100km highway; 8.4l/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 190gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, nine airbags, 18-inch alloys, leather upholstery, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, Bluetooth with audio streaming, SD card and auxiliary inputs, dual-zone air, bi-xenon headlights, six-stack CD
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...

Ford Territory, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Kia Sorento

VOLKSWAGEN **BEETLE** FROM **$30,290**



VW's second-generation New Beetle has moved right away from the hippie Love Bug image of the 1998 car towards a more sporty, powerful aesthetic, which is no bad thing because it also drives with greater purpose and competence.

It uses VW's 118TSi 1.4-litre Twincharger engine, with supercharging and turbocharging.

This engine delivers strong, refined performance, however it has been discontinued on the new Golf and there were some reliability issues on the previous model, so be aware that problems could arise, especially in hot weather.

It's matched with a six-speed manual at $30,290; the seven-speed DSG automated manual transmission model is $32,790.

Up front, there's plenty of space and a comfortable driver's seat. VW's audio system is easy to use, but I've never been able to get it to recognise my iPod when I hook it up to the factory-supplied cable.

Back seat and boot space in the Beetle are much tighter than in a Golf. Two average-sized adults can fit in the back. No curtain airbags are provided, though.

VW's electronic locking diff is standard so the Beetle has great grip and corners with balance and control. Its ride/handling compromise is fine on most surfaces, though the torsion beam axle rear end can get a bit jumpy on rough corners, and the brakes are powerful and progressive.

You buy a Beetle because you love the way it looks and makes you feel when you hop in and go for a drive. These are, of course, perfectly valid reasons to buy a car. Just ask any Mini owner why they bought theirs.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety ★★★★★	Quality and reliability ★★½☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★½☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★½☆☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ High feelgood factor
- ✔ 1.4 Twincharger goes hard
- ✔ Comfortable driver's seat and driving position
- ✔ Smooth ride and competent handling
- ✔ Safe as houses

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ Potential reliability issues
- ✘ Hope it reads your iPod
- ✘ Expensive and impractical compared with the Golf

SPEX
- Made in Mexico
- 1.4-litre supercharged and turbocharged four-cylinder petrol/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 118kW of power at 5800rpm/240Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.3 seconds
- 5.5L/100km highway; 7.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO^2 emissions are 148gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 17-inch alloy wheels, leather steering wheel, Bluetooth, dual-zone air, two gloveboxes, front and rear parking sensors, space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

compare with...
Audi A1, Mini Cooper, Fiat 500

VOLKSWAGEN **MULTIVAN** FROM **$49,990**



The 2015 Volkswagen Caravelle and Multivan can cart a tribe around with typical Kombi comfort and style.

The Caravelle has eight passenger seats (which are also removable if you want to customise the layout), each with plenty of legroom. It's powered by VW's frugal 103kW/340Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel with a seven-speed automated manual DSG gearbox.

The Multivan is a more luxurious seven-seater. It allows you to carry a full complement of kids plus heaps of gear — usually in a people mover it's one or the other.

The Multivan, also priced from $49,990 for the TDi340 Comfortline, uses the same base drivetrain as the Caravelle. A more powerful 132kW twin turbodiesel 2.0-litre engine version, the TDi400 Comfortline, starts at $56,990, or $60,990 with all wheel drive.

Top of the Multivan range is the 132kW 2.0-litre Highline TDi400 at $73,990, or $77,990 with all-wheel drive. leather and 18-inch alloys are standard.

Multivan has an amazing variety of interior configurations.

All the seats (two individual chairs for row two and a three-person bench for row three) can be adjusted on tracks, swapped around, rotated 180 degrees or removed.

Each seat also has a child-restraint anchor and the side windows have retractable sun blinds.

Stability control and two front air bags are standard in Caravelle; Multivan adds front-seat side and full-length curtain air bags.

When it comes to carrying six to eight passengers in comfort and safety, these VW vans are still unbeatable.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety ★★★★☆	Quality and reliability ★★★☆☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★☆☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★½☆
Handling ★★★½☆	**Overall** ★★★★☆

THINGS WE LIKE
- ✔ Turbodiesel torque and economy
- ✔ You can carry eight people and their gear
- ✔ Safe, secure handling
- ✔ Base Multivan is good value
- ✔ Durable, kid-proof interior

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE
- ✘ VW reliability can still be questionable
- ✘ Rear-view camera should be standard
- ✘ Seats are heavy to slide/remove

SPEX (2.0 Comfortline)
- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbodiesel/seven-speed automated manual/front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power at 3500rpm/340Nm of torque front 1750rpm
- 0–100km/h N/A
- 6.9L/100km highway; 10.4L/100km city; CO^2 emissions are 216gkm.
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- Standard: (Comfortline) stability control, six air bags, CD player, three-zone air, leather-trimmed wheel, cruise control, side-window sunblinds, alarm
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...
Honda Odyssey, Kia Grand Carnival, Mercedes Vito, Toyota Tarago

VOLVO **S60/V60** FROM **$49,990**





The Volvo S60 range opens with the 132kW 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automated manual T4 Kinetic at $49,990. The 177kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder direct-injection turbopetrol/six-speed automated manual/front-wheel-drive T5 Luxury is $59,890. The T5 R Design is $63,890.

A 120kW 2.0-litre five-cylinder D4 Kinetic turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive is $56,890.

The T6 R Design costs $71,590. Wagon versions, dubbed V60, add $1000 and are available in all variants bar the T4 and the Polestar, the top of the range S60 priced at $99,500. This model, based on the T6, gets 257kW and 500Nm and takes 4.9 seconds to reach 100km/h. The engine gets a bigger turbo at one end and a racing exhaust at the other; Ohlins suspension, six-piston Brembo calipers and 19-inch graphite alloy wheels are also featured on the Polestar.

The 177kW T5 engine , also used in the Ford Falcon, is a beauty, with strong, flexible performance, reasonable fuel economy and a very refined character.

The front-wheel-drive S60/V60 models don't quite have the high speed dynamic ability of the all-wheel-drive D5 and T6, but they are lighter and more nimble.

The T6 R Design runs a 3.0-litre turbocharged straight-six with 242kW, which is 17 kilowatts more than BMW's 3.0-litre turbo in the 335i.

It's got 80Nm more torque than the BMW motor can muster and launches the S60 to 100km/h in a respectably rapid 5.7 seconds.

It could be quicker, but at nearly 1.9 tonnes the T6 sedan is overweight, so the 3.0 is also seriously thirsty.

The T6 has all-wheel drive plus suspension that strikes a nice balance between decent handling and a compliant ride.

Volvo usually can't do both in the one car — and sometimes it can't do either — but the S60 works because it doesn't try to be a hard-edged sports sedan. It's much closer to a GT and, in this respect, it works well.

If you try to push it hard in tight corners, though, you'll soon induce deep understeer.

The classy, comfortable cabin — executed in typical clean, simple Scandinavian style — includes luxurious front seats wrapped in thick, supple leather, a BMW iDrive-style multimedia system and City Safety, a radar-based system which can automatically stop you at low speeds from rear-ending the car in front.

You can also spend another $6250 to extend its capability to detecting errant pedestrians and automatically stopping the car to prevent them from being run over.



This option also includes adaptive cruise control, collision warning with full automatic braking, lane departure warning, lane keeping, active high beam and road sign information display.

Thus equipped, it should be very difficult indeed to have a crash in the S60, though the multitude of flashing warning lights, loud alarms and at times over zealous automatic braking can drive you nuts at times in traffic.

Taller occupants in the back sit slightly knees up.

Footroom under the front seats is tight and access to the rear seat is a bit difficult for taller adults.

Volvo's terrific integrated child-booster seats make life very easy for parents. They are standard in the V60 wagon but not in the S60 sedan.

The sedan's huge boot has a clever flip-up divider. Unfortunately, there's no proper spare, just a useless repair kit.

If you're looking at mid-size sedans or wagons, it's definitely worth putting the Volvo S60 and V60 on your test-drive list.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★½☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★★½☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ The T5 is the pick of the range
- ✔ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✔ Luxuriously comfortable front seats
- ✔ City Safety works

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ T6 is overweight and thirsty
- ✘ No spare
- ✘ Weak resale values
- ✘ Some options prices are absurd
- ✘ Tight foot room under front seats

SPEX (S60 T6)

- Made in Sweden
- 3.0-litre straight-six turbo/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 242kW of power at 5400rpm/480Nm of torque from 3000-3600rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.7 seconds
- 7.5L/100km highway; 14.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 243gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard (T6): Six airbags, stability control, City Safety, 18-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, voice-activated Bluetooth, navigation, audio streaming and USB connectivity, alarm, front and rear parking sensors
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 26%

compare with...

Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes CLA, Peugeot 508

VOLVO **V40** FROM **$36,990**



Volvo's V40 five-door hatchback range opens with the 84kW 1.6-litre turbodiesel/six-speed manual D2 Kinetic, at $36,990.

The 130kW 2.0-litre five-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed manual D4 Kinetic is $40,490. The six-speed auto adds $2000.

The D4 Luxury, with the auto as standard, is $46,490.

The 132kW 2.0-litre five-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed auto T4 Kinetic is $41,990. The T4 Luxury, tested here, is $45,990.

The 187kW, 2.5-litre, five-cylinder turbopetrol T5 R-Design, also with the six-speed auto, is $49,990.

A high-riding, faux SUV variant, the Cross Country, is priced at $47,990 for the front-wheel drive D4 and $52,990 for the all-wheel drive T5

The 2.0-litre turbopetrol T4 is the pick of the range. Its delivery maximises bottom-end and midrange power at the expense of the top end, which is pretty flat beyond 5000rpm.

However, in 99 per cent of driving, the engine is strong, exceptionally smooth, and Volvo has all but muted the usual five-cylinder drone. It's a happy match with the six-speed auto. Normal and Sport modes are provided; the latter produces a slightly too-sensitive accelerator and busier shifting, with timely kickdown in slow corners.

An extra cylinder does see the Volvo engine use more fuel than its four cylinder German rivals, though.

The V40 handles like an A-grade sporty hatch, flat and nicely balanced, with sharp, responsive turn-in (and little feedback) from the electric steering, minimal understeer and good grip.

The ride is comfortable and compliant, while the brakes, though lacking feel at the pedal, have plenty of power.

You sit in a typically luxurious Volvo chair, though the backrest lacks upper body support. Volvo does beautiful interior design of exceptional quality.

Here, its TFT (thin film transistor) instruments feature three modes — Eco, Elegance and Performance — each of which is crystal clear and informative. You sit high, however rear vision is compromised by the small back window and thick rear corners.

Rear seat space is OK, but there's little wriggle room to get your feet under the front seats.

The shallow boot can be extended and has a space saver underneath.

The V40 scored the highest result ever in EuroNCAP crash tests. It has a world-first pedestrian airbag and Volvo's City Safety emergency braking system, which can stop you rear-ending another car at low speed, as standard.

Adaptive cruise control, blind spot information, active high beam, cross-traffic alert, collision warning with full automatic braking, driver alert, lane keeping, automatic parking, road sign information and pedestrian detection, which can avoid a collision with a pedestrian at speeds up to 35km/h, are optional. Tick all these boxes and you have the most formidable safety package in the world.

It's not perfect, though. The road speed sign information system often displayed a different speed to the prevailing limit.

The distance alert too often triggered distracting warning lights on the head up display, and occasionally an audible warning, in response to false readings such as a car coming the other way in a corner, or when no risk was present.

I turned both off, as well as the lane keeping system, which kept unnecessarily and annoyingly interfering with the steering.

Thankfully, I didn't get to test the pedestrian avoidance system or the airbag.

Still, this is new technology and it takes a while to perfect. With or without these options, a drive in the V40 T4 is recommended.

STARS ★★★★☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★★☆
Performance
★★★★☆
Handling
★★★☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★☆☆
Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
Value for money
★★★★☆
Overall
★★★★☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Beautiful design, inside and out
- ✔ Strong, refined T4 drivetrain
- ✔ Athletic handling and a comfortable ride
- ✔ As safe as humanly possible
- ✔ Luxury is well equipped and good value

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Some of the safety options need work
- ✘ Tight rear-seat footroom
- ✘ Restricted rear vision
- ✘ Driver's seat lacks upper body support
- ✘ No rear camera on Kinetic

SPEX (T4 LUXURY)

- Made in Sweden
- 2.0-litre five-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 132kW of power at 5000rpm/300Nm of torque from 2700-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 10.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 177gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, three years scheduled servicing, leather upholstery, 17-inch alloy wheels, navigation with voice control, rear camera, City Safety, Bluetooth, USB port
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 39%

compare with...

Alfa Guilietta, Audi A3, BMW 1 Series, Mercedes A Class, VW Golf

VOLVO **XC60** FROM **$57,890**



Volvo's base XC60 T5 Kinetic 2.0-litre direct-injection four-cylinder turbopetrol/ eight-speed automatic, front-wheel drive is $57,890. The T5 Luxury variant is $62,890. The front-wheel-drive D4 2.0-litre five-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed auto Kinetic is $59,890; the Luxury is $64,890.

All-wheel-drive models include the D5 Luxury 2.4-litre five-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed auto at $69,990, or $73,990 as the R-Design. The T6 Luxury 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbopetrol model is $74,990 or $78,590, with the extra R-Design bling.

The 3.0-litre turbo straight six, with 225kW of power, is one of the most potent engines in this class, but it is hideously thirsty. It's an old single turbo design so its boost also arrives late and very suddenly.

The T5's 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine, also used in the Falcon, is a sparkling, smooth device, a bit languid off idle but with a sporty flavour that works particularly well with the six-speed automated manual.

The 2.4-litre twin-turbodiesel five cylinder has a low-revving, torquey character that gets the XC60 along in a supremely relaxed manner. As a day-to-day drive, with plenty of grunt and good fuel efficiency, it's the pick of them.

The "Polestar-optimised" 3.0-litre in the R-Design T6 produces 242kW and 480Nm (40Nm more than stock.) The Polestar treatment is also included in the 2.4-litre D5 R-Design, which yields 169kW and 470Nm (30Nm more than stock). Both engines are also available in the respective Luxury variants.

Like many Volvos, the XC60 is extremely sensitive to wheel/tyre choice. The firmer the suspension, the bigger the wheels and the lower the tyres' aspect ratio, the more dysfunctional its ride/handling compromise becomes.

The D5, on 18s with 235/60 rubber and standard suspension, is a stodgy, comfortable wagon that fills its family freighter brief well enough.

The top-spec T6 R-Design, on optional 20-inch alloys (in lieu of standard 19s) with 255/45 tyres and "sports" suspension, is a mess. It feels unbalanced in corners, the ride is lumpy and jostly, the steering offers zero feel, is excessively self-centring and hard work on a bumpy road.

Volvo, as usual, delivers elegant design, first-class quality and a swag of practical, family-friendly touches. XC60 inherits the V40's beautiful, informative three-mode TFT instruments and the driver's seat is luxuriously comfortable.

All models come standard with City Safety, a radar-based system that operates at speeds of less than 50km/h and can automatically bring the Volvo to a quick stop if it detects you are about to run into the car in front. If you're doing less than 15km/h, Volvo claims you will, as opposed to might, stop in time to avoid an impact altogether.

The $5000 Driver Support Pack, available only on Luxury and R-Design variants, includes blind spot warning with cross traffic alert, lane keeping and departure warning, active high beam, road sign display, adaptive cruise with collision warning, full autobrake, pedestrian and cyclist detection, plus front and rear parking sensors.

The comfortable back seat has enough legroom for most adults and is tailor-made for kids. Both outboard positions have Volvo's integrated fold-up child booster seat. The seat is split 40/20/40, with three restraint anchors.

The XC60 has more boot space than the BMW, Audi and Lexus RX350. The low floor can be extended to a flat 1.8 metres using the 40/20/40 facility on the rear-seat back, and a power tailgate is standard. So is a protective mesh safety net, which can be secured to the roof. A temporary spare is located under the floor.

STARS ★★★☆☆

Safety
★★★★★
Green Vehicle Guide
★★★☆☆
Performance
★★★½☆
Handling
★★☆☆☆
Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
Comfort and refinement
★★½☆☆
Value for money
★★★☆☆
Overall
★★★☆☆



THINGS WE LIKE

- ✔ Good space efficiency
- ✔ D5 and T5 are strong engines
- ✔ Beautiful design and excellent quality
- ✔ City Safe
- ✔ Built-in booster seats

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✘ Sloppy handling
- ✘ Rugged ride
- ✘ Remote control, shake-prone steering

SPEX (2.4 D5)

- Made in Sweden
- 2.4-litre five-cylinder turbodiesel/ six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 158kW of power at 4000rpm/440Nm of torque from 1500-4800rpm
- 0–100km/h: 8.3 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kllometres
- 5.7L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 183gkm
- Standard: City Safe, six airbags, stability control, rear camera, power tailgate, automatic air, Bluetooth, USB port, 17-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, rear parking sensors and a trip computer
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 40%

compare with...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Range Rover Evoque

Don’t get distracted. Complete it.

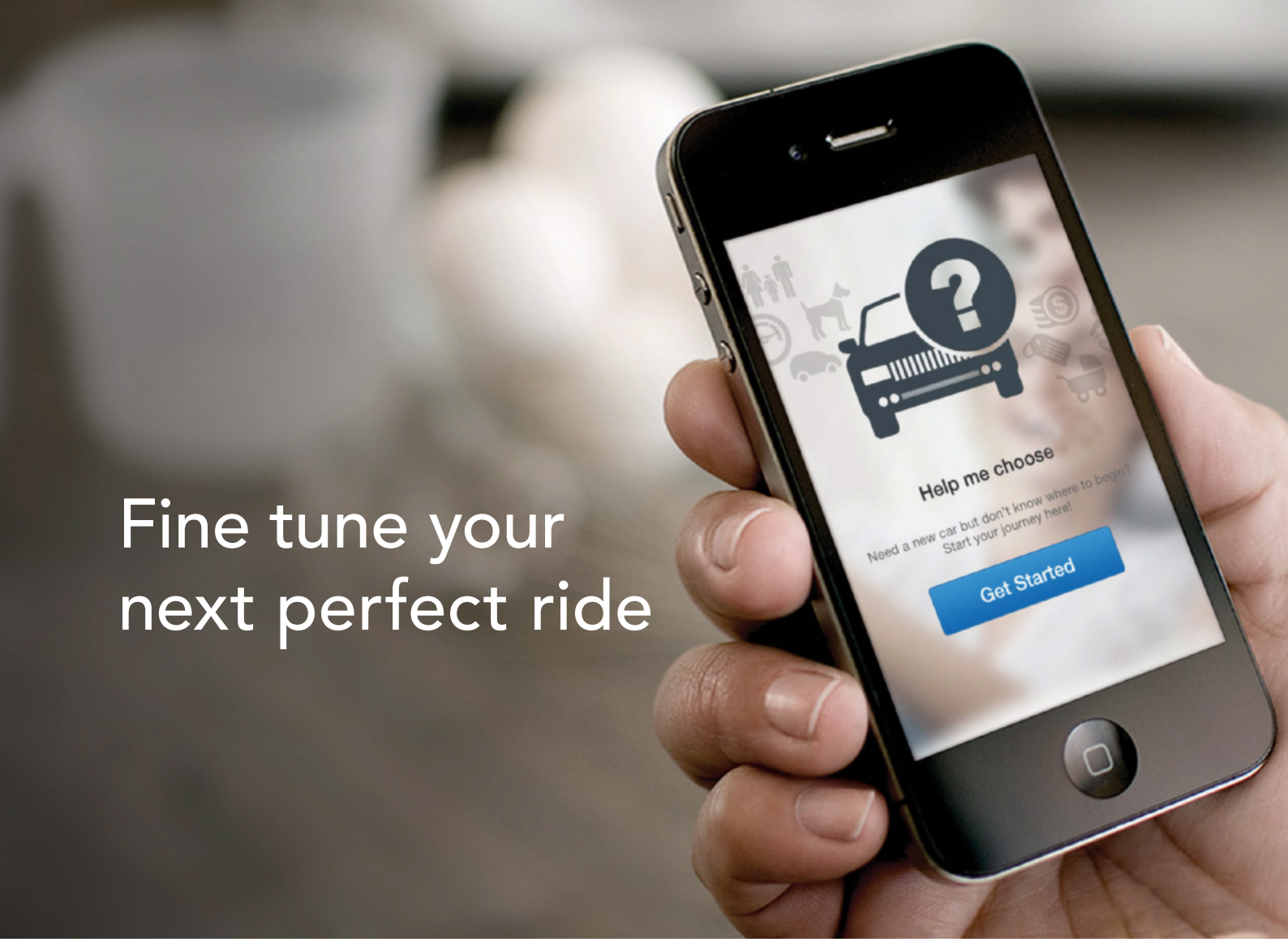
Your one-touch resource with all the tips, advice and current trends for your home.



Delivered to your inbox. Subscribe at:

completehome.com.au

pinterest.com/completehomeau twitter.com/completehome facebook.com/completehome.com.au



Fine tune your next perfect ride

We make finding your next brand new car easy, by starting you off in the right direction. Our Help me choose tool provides assistance to help you make the right decision based on budget, lifestyle, fuel economy and a range of other needs.

carsales.com.au/hmc

More brand new cars than anywhere else

Available on